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ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER AT THE NEW YORK, N. Y., POST OFFICE.

May 13, 1891.

No. 655.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LI.



OR, The War-Clan of Lucifer Annex.

BY WM. H. MANNING,
AUTHOR OF "CENTRAL PACIFIC PAUL," "HOT
HEART," "YANK YELLOWBIRD," "OLD
DOUBLEDARK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE MYSTERIOUS BRAND.

PICKS and spades had been put aside; the noisy machinery had ceased to be heard; and the men who dug gold through the day were beginning to get ready for an evening event which had put all Glory Eden in a state of eager anticipation. Glory Eden was not an Old World institution, but an Eden of the Rocky Mountains; a town perched on the side of the foot-hills, and peopled with miners whose honesty varied from good to extremely bad.

In Red Ring's Hotel a young man was leaning against the desk, listening to the eloquent landlord.

"Of course you want to go," asserted Red Ring. "Our town never gave a mask-ball before, but when we set out to do a thing, we do it

"WHAR YOU GO STRAWBERRY SAM GENERALLY IS FOUND. DON'T THINK YOU KIN DIE HYER, FER I WON'T ALLOW FIRE, NOR FLOOD, NOR MAN TER GET AHEAD O' ME IN MY VENGEANCE!"

Strawberry Sam.

up brown. Go, by all means. All Glory Eden will be there—all but Lucifer Annex."

"Lucifer Annex?" repeated the young man.

"Yes. Ain't you heard of that?"

"No."

"Go to Mozambique Point, and cast your eyes west, and you'll see a lake and an island—"

"I did see them, to-day, and was tempted to go over and visit the island."

"Thank your good angel you didn't go; not that you ain't able to care for yourself—you look fit to do that, in any niche of the Wild West—but bad communications corrupt good manners. Lucifer Annex is all that it's name implies. The roughs and toughs of our town live there, and I suppose you could smell brimstone by going on the island, the gang is so mighty wicked. One Graf Giblon is the head of them all, and rumor says he and murder have hobnobbed for many a year."

"Why do you allow such a man near?"

"Because Graf won't give us any chance to fire him out; that is, he won't misbehave so we can have excuse for going for him."

"Selfish Graf!"

"But we know he's an outlaw and tough; that's what all the island crowd are. They have a dozen women there, but they can give the men odds and beat them out at that. They do say, though," added Red Ring, lowering his voice to a confidential pitch, "that Graf Giblon's daughter, Cythia, is the most beautiful young woman in these parts!"

"Will she be at the ball, to-night?"

"Will she?" cried the landlord, lifting both hands in horror. "Well, I reckon not! Why, they'd as soon have the seven-year itch!"

"I should prefer Cythia!"

"Have you ever seen her?"

"Never."

"You don't want to."

"What is her crime? Is she a murderer, thief, decoy, or anything of that sort?"

"She's Graf Giblon's daughter—"

"A serious charge!"

"And a firebrand. Temper? A mad dog wouldn't be in it with her. Wild? Like an eagle. Bold? Like a panther. Revengeful? A regular Injun. Ain't she, Manfred?"

Back of the young stranger who was thus receiving news from the landlord lay a dark-haired, olive-cheeked, rather foppishly-attired youth of about twenty. He lay on the bench with half-closed eyes, indolently smoking a cigarette, and apparently taking no interest in the conversation. He now answered with terse indifference:

"I reckon!"

"I should like to see this young woman, observed the stranger by the desk.

"Providence protect you, if you do, Mr.—"

The landlord hesitated and glanced toward the hotel register.

"Bridle-path," finished the stranger.

"Say, that's a queer name of yours."

"Very commonplace, I think."

"Opinions differ. Hello! here comes another Wild West curiosity. His name is Strawberry Sam; I'll say that much, but if you don't hear the rest of the story from Sam, himself, it'll be because he ain't in a mood as talkative as usual."

Bridle-path looked toward the door. A man had entered and was coming toward the desk. At first Bridle-path saw nothing more uncommon about him than that, even in a land of athletic men, he was singularly large and strong. He was not of great height, but from shoulder to shoulder he was wonderfully broad, and his limbs were those of a man of vast strength.

His age was less than fifty, and his round face had the faultless color which came of good health. His hair was jet black, but his face was clean-shaven, revealing the square jaws which told of indomitable courage and iron will.

As he came nearer it became evident that he had eyes remarkably black and piercing. He was looking at Bridle-path intently, and those eyes seemed to glow, to pierce the object of his regard. There was something more than natural about them, too, as the most casual observer would be quick to discover.

Red Ring introduced the other men, and they shook hands. As they did so, and while those right members were clasped, Strawberry Sam reached out his left arm, rested his wrist upon them, and let the connecting hand fall as low as nature would allow.

Such a singular proceeding could not but arouse Bridle-path's curiosity. He looked down and saw the arm—a muscular arm which was bared to the elbow—and upon its broader, or back part, there was revealed a spot of strangely bright-red color.

When he saw that mark it flashed upon Bridle-path whence came Strawberry Sam's sibriket; with a little stretch of the imagination, the red spot was very much like a strawberry.

The new-comer's gaze did not wander from Bridle-path's face, and when the latter again looked up he met with a regard that seemed actuated by an attempt to read his inmost thought. And Strawberry Sam's black eyes glowed with a brilliancy which would have startled a timid man.

"This person is deranged," thought Bridle-

path, and, not being timid, himself, he returned the gaze calmly and mildly.

"You notice it?" questioned the marked man, in slow utterance.

"You refer to—"

Bridle-path intentionally left the sentence unfinished, and his strange companion quietly relaxed his hold and touched the red spot with the forefinger of his right hand.

"The birthmark," he replied.

"Yes; I noticed it."

Intently those black eyes studied the speaker's face still further.

"Did you ever see it before?" he finally asked.

"No."

"Or hear of it?"

"Never!"

"It always has been thar; a birthmark which no one can fail ter see, ef he comes near me."

"We named him Strawberry Sam, as soon as he came to Glory Eden," explained Red Ring.

For the first time the intense gaze wandered, and the strange man stretched out both hands horizontally from his body. This movement brought a new fact into preminence. He wore a red shirt, the right sleeve of which encircled his wrist, but the left was cut off at the elbow, leaving the lower arm bare. Muscular as the arm was, and as much as it had been exposed to the weather, it was darkened by neither a heavy hirsute growth nor a great amount of sunburn and tan; it was strangely white, under the circumstances, and the red birthmark showed out boldly.

"That's a whim of his," added Red Ring.

"Hot weather or cold, dry or wet, you'll see Sam with that left arm bared to the elbow; the sleeve neatly cut off. Last winter the mercury went to forty below 'round here, but Sam's arm was never covered."

Bridle-path began to be interested.

"You have some special reason, I suppose?"

"I want folks ter see that!" explained Sam, pointing to the mark.

"Why? if I may ask."

"Because I am huntin' fer a man!"

There was a world of meaning in the sentence, and the way it was uttered, yet the man's speech did not quicken. His voice was a trifle hoarse, and his eyes grew wilder.

"Why?" Bridle-path plainly asked.

"Because I want ter find him, an' ter do it, I jest carry that mark exposed, an' show it ter every one I meet."

"But if you want to find a certain man, how do you further your ends by exhibiting the mark to 'every one you meet'?"

"Because I don't know who he is."

"You are ignorant of his personal appearance, or his name?"

"Both! I don't know either."

"What then is your clew to him?"

"This mark!" and again Sam touched the strawberry.

"I don't comprehend clearly."

"That man," explained the previous speaker, "knows I have got his brand, an' that I am his deadly enemy. Ef ever he has the birthmark put up in his face, he'll show quiet. It's the only clew I hev ter him, so I go 'round an' show it ter whoever I meet, an' watch the effect. When I find him, I shall know it the second his eyes an' mine do their duty. This mark," Strawberry Sam added, "is my only clew to a man I am going to kill!"

"You think he will betray himself?"

"I know he will."

"But suppose he is so cool, so iron-nerved that he succeeds in hiding his fears? Again, since you have the mark always exposed and must be of some notoriety, suppose that he hears of you and your mission of vengeance, if such it is, before you see him? Would he not try to kill you before you got sight of him?"

"That's jes' what I want him ter try!"

"The dickens you do!"

"He won't succeed," replied Strawberry Sam, with simple confidence. "I don't fear any man livin', an' I ask no more than that he shall hear o' me, an' try the killin' game. I want the news ter spread; I want him ter go fer me."

"You're a modern Ajax, eh?"

"What's that?"

"Ajax was a gentleman of the days of dusty antiquity, who struck a pose and defied the lightning. You are in the same business, you see."

Sam meditated deeply for a few moments.

"The p'int is too deep fer me," he finally confessed, "but you've got the facts in the other case."

He held up his bared arm, studied the mark for awhile, and then added:

"I've traveled thousands o' miles ter show that brand, but I ain't seen the man yet. Fer five montis I've been stationary right hyer in Glory Eden, never leavin'. Yer see, a fortuneteller tol' me this was whar I'd meet him, so, o' course, I needn't wander on any more."

Bridle-path heard this childlike declaration without a smile, though he was not impressed by it; he lacked his companion's faith in far-seers.

"I judge that you hate this unknown man," he observed.

Strawberry Sam's eyes flashed in a startling way.

"Hate him!" he cried. "Why, the word don't half tell it. Hate him! This world is big, but not big enough fer him an' me, both. One on us must get off of it forever!"

CHAPTER II.

THE WEAVER OF THE MASK.

"SAM is in dead earnest," remarked Red Ring. "He ain't a trifler, and I pity his man when he falls up against him. Sam, though, is one of our best citizens; he works hard every day with pick and spade in the mines, and has our sympathy. We all hope he will get the man who has wronged him."

"Get him!" echoed the miner. "Of course I'll git him. The fortune-teller said he'd come hyer, right ter Glory Eden; so all I've got ter do is ter wait. When he comes—wal, the score will be wiped out."

Those fierce eyes were not pleasant for the ordinary person to look at, but Bridle-path did not seem to be affected in the least. Neither had he so much curiosity as Red Ring; the latter often looked at the birthmark, as if fascinated, but Bridle-path practically ignored it. Yet, that muscular arm, so vividly marked, with the severed sleeve in strong contrast to its intact mate, rose from the domain of oddity when its history was known to be something striking, strange and uncanny.

Strawberry Sam did not linger much longer, but went out as quietly as he had come in.

"How is that?" asked Red Ring.

"Nothing stereotyped about his ways."

"A little loose in his head, I reckon."

"Don't you think his grudge a genuine one?"

"It may be, but I can't think he has a clear comprehension of it, himself. No doubt he has cause to hate some one, but that the course of his vendetta demands any such conduct as his, I don't believe. Nobody in Glory Eden has succeeded in finding out the cause of his grudge, he will not tell the story, and I doubt if he could. In brief, I think he is tangled up, mentally, and drifting without a rudder."

Bridle-path deliberately lighted a cigar, and then answered:

"I differ with you. The man is eccentric, I admit, but I think he is well balanced, and as sane as you or I. More than that, I reckon he will yet find his man."

"If he does, I pity that man; Sam will eat him up."

"My friend, in a case of that kind we can't always distinguish the eater from the eatee until the feast is over. But as to the ball to-night: I think I'll go. Mayor Allen has kindly invited me, and a little harmless diversion is good for man. You see," added Mr. Bridle-path, knocking the ashes from his cigar, "I am a surveyor by trade, and have done most of my dancing in the last five years with grizzlies and Indians. I'll go!"

The landlord encouraged this resolution, secretly thinking that if his guest were not to be masked, he would be an immense favorite with the young ladies of Glory Eden. Bridle-path was less than thirty years of age, athletic and handsome—so Mr. Ring decided. There was only one thing against him: the landlord felt hurt because mystery and doubt surrounded his name. If he had come there as "Black Jack," "Broncho Tom," or "Grizzly Ben," it would have been the most commonplace thing in the world; all such names were prevalent in, and appropriate to, the West. But when a man called himself "Bridle-path"—why, it was absurd, and Mr. Ring's feelings were hurt.

"He might as well sail around as Saddle-horn, Rifle-muzzle, or something of that sort," the landlord observed to a friend, later.

"Who is he, really?"

"Find out if you can; I can't. He's close-mouthed as a clam, and nothing can I learn. Calls himself a surveyor, but that's open to doubt. He's a fine figure and face, though, I'll swear, and if I were he, I'd smash the hearts of half the girls in creation!"

As Red Ring was a very plain-looking man, this enthusiasm was pardonable.

Bridle-path went to the ball, but his disguise was not much of a disguise. He bought a mask and adjusted it, and the work was done. It was a very small affair, which concealed but little more than his nose and cheek-bones, and those who had known him before, would have no great amount of trouble in recognizing him again.

Glory Eden, as a whole, was not so indifferent. Her sons and daughters wished to do things in style, and Bridle-path, who had seen a good deal of the world, was surprised that a mere mining-town should present such varied disguises and fine costumes.

Circumstances had previously thrown the surveyor into the company of Mayor Allen; that dignitary had taken a fancy to him, and he came to the stranger soon after the latter entered the ball and stood looking at the couples whirling in the mazes of a dance.

"What do you think of it, Mr. Bridle-path?" asked the mayor, who wore no disguise.

"The brilliancy of the scene dazzles me."

"Good! I like compliments, and have worked

hard to fix things for the young folks. Will you dance?"

"I am hardly well enough acquainted—"

"Do you remember that I introduced you, in my office, to Miss Estella, daughter of Charles Curtis?"

"I remember it well, but she is the only young lady I've spoken to in Glory Eden."

"Let me give you a partner."

The surveyor did not object, and, a few moments later, came the introduction: "Miss Dash, Mr. Blank!" Bridle-path smiled, and "Miss Dash," who was garbed as a peasant girl, laughed slightly. They conversed for a short time, and he made two discoveries—first, she was a sensible girl who could talk well; second, it was Miss Estella Curtis, herself. He made known the discovery, at once.

"I owe Mayor Allen no thanks for this!" declared the lady, with resentment.

"I fear I am not complimented."

"Don't take that view of the matter; I meant no slight to you; but he has betrayed my identity to at least one person. He introduced me to you in his office; your wits would have been dull not to know me now, with suspicion thus directed. I shall be revenged on the mayor. You, I cannot forgive, since you have not offended."

Her manner set his mind at ease, and he asked her to dance, an invitation which was not refused. That dance brought him a new experience. He was often near a closely-masked woman who figured as a Spanish girl; his hand touched hers, and he fancied she hovered near him, at times, more than occasion demanded.

When the dance was over he led Miss Curtis to a seat, lingered for awhile in her presence, and then went outside.

The hall boasted of a fine piazza attachment, which was wide, long and roomy. It could boast of no ornaments in the way of potted plants, or similar things, but it was pleasant. The hour was early; the merry-makers had not begun to tire; the surveyor found himself alone, and sat down under the impression that he would remain so for some time to come.

He was in error. In a few minutes a female figure emerged from the ball-room. She paused near him, and, even in the dim light, he recognized the Spanish girl. Twice he saw her glance toward him, but he remained impassive. Finally she came forward quickly, yet with an appearance of diffidence which, he suspected, was a counterfeit.

"Pardon me," she requested, "but have I not recognized an old friend in you?"

"If so, you have the advantage of me," Bridle-path answered, quietly.

"I am not a Spaniard."

"Nor I."

"Don't you recognize me?"

"Frankly, no."

"Isn't your name Charles Piercy?"

"Decidedly not."

"Then I am wholly at loss."

Her manner did not indicate surprise or disappointment, and he was not slow to decide that Mr. Piercy was a myth; that the girl was not as diffident as she pretended to be; and that she had sought the interview deliberately.

Being an observing man he noticed that she was of fine figure. She also had a melodious voice, and intuition told him she was beautiful. While not a cynic, there was much of indifference in his nature, and he felt less flattered than would the average man.

"Pray be seated," he returned, coolly. "The disappearance of Mr. Piercy should be considered. Do you fear foul play?"

She turned the battery of her eyes upon him, evidently puzzled, and he saw that those eyes were dark and lustrous.

"I trust he has come to no harm," she answered.

"Shall I give an alarm?"

"I think he is able to care for himself."

"Score one for Charles."

"How can you speak so lightly of your fellow-men?"

"My interest is more in my fellow-women, if you will pardon the paradoxical term," the surveyor remarked, bluntly. "If this confession is barbarian-like, pray excuse me. I come from the wild mountains, where grizzlies, and so forth, care not whether a man speaks soldier or carpet-English. Presenting myself in this strong light, which dazzles but does not reveal anything lofty in me, would it be surprising if I say in my plain way that I'd like to know who you are?"

"Why do you desire this?"

"The demon of curiosity is responsible."

"I do not need such a revelation."

"By which you mean—what?"

"That I know you."

"Do you insist that I must be Piercy?"

"Second thought is always best. You are not he. You are the stranger who is at the hotel."

"You have the advantage of me."

"Would it be any advantage to know me?"

"Certainly."

"You shall, later."

Bridle-path was deriving considerable satisfaction from this interview. He did not know who his companion was, but her manner and voice,

rather than her words, betrayed a strong desire to make herself agreeable. That she had known him from the first, and deliberately sought the interview, he felt confident. A certain modest and reserved manner did not hide the fact that she was glad she was in his company, and he did not gain faith in her timidity as the time passed.

After awhile he suggested that they return to the ball-room and dance, which they did. At the end of ten minutes he was ready to assert that she was the best dancer in the room. Beyond that he was not enthusiastic; her manner grew so attentive—he did not term it affectionate—that he felt that they must be attracting attention.

When they left the floor she showed a disposition to monopolize him, but he left her and again danced with Estella Curtis. His late companion quickly had another partner, for her dancing was creating notice.

When there was another lull, Mayor Allen came to Bridle-path.

"I say, who is the Spanish girl?" the official asked.

"I don't know."

"But you acted like old friends."

"As far as I know, I never saw her before this evening."

"She puzzles me," declared Allen. "I could boast that I'm too old a bird to be deceived by these flimsy disguises, here, were it not for her. All the other young damsels I've studied out, but the senorita I can't place. Hang me if I can!"

"Why not dance with her?"

"It's out of my line."

"There's to be a general unmasking, later, isn't there? That'll bring the girl to the front."

"But I can't think of any girl in town who is not otherwise represented. I may have skipped one, and she may be the so-called Spaniard, but I can't catch the thread."

"She is a clipper, mayor."

"Too much so, I fear. She has fought her way into favor by means of fine dancing and a superb figure, but I don't like her. At times she acts the diffident part; then she comes out bold and pronounced. What I fear is that she is some stranger, from Gold Run or Blind Horse, and that she is isn't in our class. We are not snobs here, Mr. Bridle-path, but we do aim to keep our shirts clean. Tough men or women are not in our line."

The surveyor was rather amused by Allen's concern, and, as time passed, he saw that it did not lessen. There was no good reason why it should. The Spanish girl out-raced her fair sisters and became the belle of the room. She danced nearly all the time, and would have kept Bridle-path as a partner if she could. She tried, too, to capture him for an interview on the piazza, but he avoided it skillfully, without being discourteous.

And Mr. Allen looked on and frowned, and wondered repeatedly who this strange girl was who had become the central figure in the social event.

CHAPTER III.

BY THE SHAFT IN THE OLD MINE.

ESTELLA was the supposed child of a man noted for eccentricity. Charles G. Curtis owned the Banquo Mine, one of the best paying of the several concerns of the kind that were giving Glory Eden fame and money. Everybody considered Estella a fortunate young woman. She was the undisputed mistress of the finest private house in town, and, instead of being restricted in the use of money, Mr. Curtis actually urged her to spend more than she did.

He loved her devotedly, and did all that was possible to make her happy.

He had not come to Glory Eden a rich man, but then, he had come before Glory Eden was thought of. He had the honor of being the oldest settler. His first mining had been done in a place now deserted, though not far from his present mine.

Black Bear, the old mine was called, and it had been a colossal failure. A little golden gain at the start had led to the sinking of several shafts, and, of course, these remained when it was deserted.

If any one had gone there to investigate he would have found a tangle of passages running in various directions, and undermining what was originally a common cave; but no one ever did go there except Curtis.

This was one of his hobbies. If he was missing when wanted the surmise was always hazarded that he was at the Black Bear. He went often, but principally at night, and wandered around as if the place had a fascination for him.

He often had been asked why he so frequented it, but inquirers were not the wiser for their pains.

Mr. Curtis was not at the ball. He had been invited, but had declined courteously, and never thought of the matter again.

After Estella left the house he read the weekly newspaper, published in the East, upon which he relied for all things outside of Glory Eden; and then rose and left the house. Armed with a stout stick he ascended the rough hill back of the town and went straight to the Black Bear.

His manner was mechanical, and much like that of a business man who seeks his office day by day in a way instinctive rather than deliberate.

The exterior opening was like a tunnel, and about forty feet square. He passed in and was in total darkness, but soon procured and lighted a lantern.

He was in the original cave, a place four hundred feet long, and about one-fourth as wide, on the average. As the light flickered on the walls the application of the name "Black" Bear, became apparent; the rocks were black, and it would have been gloomy to any one except him.

It was a place, too, where an ignorant person would expect to find a ghost and all things uncanny, but if Charles Curtis feared anything of the kind he gave no sign. He wandered around the cave, pausing long at each shaft and looked gravely, yet without sign of emotion, into the dark expanse below. The shafts were not deep, and he often descended by means of the ladders therein, but this time he did not take the fancy to go down.

Hundreds of times in the last eighteen years he had made these visits to the Black Bear; visits that, to his friends, seemed as devoid of object as anything earthly could be.

On this occasion he was not to finish his survey undisturbed. He turned from one of the shafts and found himself face to face with a second man.

Other persons might have been startled. He was not. He simply lifted the lantern so that its light fell fully upon the intruder, and saw a strange face.

The unknown pointed to the shaft and very calmly observed:

"An ugly place to tumble down!"

"Yes," replied Curtis, in a matter-of-fact way.

"I suppose you never tried it?"

"No."

"Ever know any one who did?"

"In some of the other mines, yes."

"But not here?"

"No."

The stranger laughed shortly, and retorted in a sneering manner:

"You say it well."

"Sir?" returned Curtis, in polite inquiry.

"Old man, you don't know me, do you?"

"I don't remember that I ever saw you before."

"Very likely, you never did; I am a stranger in this section. As I have come to stay, I may as well introduce myself. Know me as Wesley Charles Eastman, a statistician by calling. It's an odd fancy of yours to come to this abandoned mine at such an hour. Why do you do it? Aren't you afraid of ghosts?"

"Ghosts?"

"That's what I said. Ghosts: disembodied spirits, phantom forms, thin shades. See dictionary for the rest. Why, man, Richard Mayo's spook may be at your elbow, now!"

The mine-owner started nervously; no small thing in the life of such a man. His placid, quiet, easy-going life had been free from the nervous thrills of persons of different mold. He looked around as if he, too, thought the ghost might be at his elbow, whereupon Wesley Eastman laughed aloud.

"I'm onto you, old chap!" he declared, in a very offensive manner.

"What do you mean by talking so absurdly?"

"Is that what you call it? Suppose I should go to a certain young lady in town and say: 'Your name is not Estella Curtis, but Estella Mayo?' What then?"

Mr. Curtis's rosy cheeks grew pale, and he looked at his mocking companion with frightened eyes.

"What manner of a devil are you?" he demanded.

Eastman laughed loudly.

"I said I was onto you, old fellow," he replied. "When I came to Glory Eden people told me of your strange fancy for visiting this old, played-out mine as you do. Strange! There's nothing strange about it; 'tis the fascination of crime that draws you. You want to see the place where you hurled Richard Mayo to his death—down there!"

Again he pointed to the shaft, but Charles Curtis gave the pause no chance to become dramatic. He broke forth fiercely:

"It is false! I never did anything of the kind."

"Do you deny that he died here?"

"Who was Richard Mayo, anyhow?"

"The question is timely, and it is likely that no one else in Glory Eden could answer it. Certainly, you have taken great pains to make an answer out of the question; to make his name unknown here. When Mayo died there were fifty men and women, more or less, living here, but all went away within two years. Why? Because each and all of them had received flattering offers to remove to places at a distance. Odd, wasn't it? but it does not puzzle you or me. You wanted to get rid of all here who knew any part of the truth, and it was you who, unknown to them, found the good business chances and so lured them away. You wanted

no one here who was aware that Estella was the daughter, not of Curtis, but of dead Richard Mayo!"

Curtis looked long and earnestly at the speaker, and no one, seeing him, could doubt that he was both troubled and alarmed.

"You are not one of the old residents?"

"Hardly! I was only about a dozen years old when you created the exodus."

"You have seen one of them, then?"

"Never mind how I had my information. You can't surmise, and it will puzzle you all the more when I convince you that I know more than the men you sent away from Glory Eden."

"I do not see why we need discuss this—"

"You shall be convinced. I dislike"—here the old sneering, mocking manner broke forth again—"to see a man stumble around in the dark when I can just as well enlighten him."

"But this is my private business, and as I know all about it, why should we waste time—"

"Charles, don't you want to learn just how much I know about it?"

The mine-owner's gaze wavered and fell.

"Proceed!" he directed, faintly.

"Thanks, general! Well, you and Richard Mayo came here as miners, and bought the Black Bear property together. You worked it with pick and spade, alone, for awhile, but finally engaged men and sunk these shafts. Worthless as the property is, now, it paid a few dollars at the start, but never enough to encourage work. When abandoned, it was your debtor to the tune of some hundreds of dollars.

"You were a single man, or, at least, seemed to be, but Mayo brought his young wife and child here—the latter a mere babe. The wife is represented as having been a pretty, delicate woman, who did not have courage enough to assert her rights.

"She died in this camp, before him, I think, and poor Mayo had only the infant to remind him of days gone by.

"At that time the affairs of Curtis & Mayo were in a precarious state. The Black Bear was a dead failure, and everybody saw it. One evening you and he stood in this cave, close to one of these shafts—I think, the same one now by us—and discussed the situation.

"Pluck is a good thing, but judgment is better. You saw that it would be folly to keep to work here, and decided that it should be abandoned. Mayo must have been in a different mood from you when this talk took place. Your mood may be inferred from what followed.

"While he stood looking down the shaft he suddenly received a push from behind which hurled him down the black abyss. He was found there the next day, dead.

"How did he die? An accident, every one said. You and I know better. Charles Curtis, you flung him to his death!"

Speaking solemnly, almost sepulchrally, Eastman once more pointed to the shaft.

"It is false!" cried the mine-owner. "It is infamously false!"

"It is true."

"You are dealing in imagination, of which you seem to have more than your share. How dare you accuse me, sir? For a score of years I have lived at Glory Eden, and not one of my townsmen has ever made the lightest charge against me. Now, you, a stranger, come, and talk with the glibness of a parrot. How dare you, sir?"

Eastman ignored the reply. Curtis's agitation was sufficient proof that he had made an impression. He bowed and continued:

"You were not wholly hardened. Mayo's child, Estella, was left doubly orphaned, and you took her in, called her your own child, and reared her as such. To-day she is the reputed heiress of a fortune probably not much short of a million, and fully believes herself to be your child. Great heavens! what if she knew she was in charge of the man who murdered her father, Richard Mayo?"

"She is *not* his child!" declared Curtis.

"And she is yours, eh?"

"Yes."

"My dear sir, don't talk about my romancing; I am not in it with you. Romances or not, I fancy you would not like to have me tell Estella what I have told you—"

"Scoundrel! would you do that?" cried Curtis, almost fiercely.

"Friend, I don't want to; I want to live in peace and harmony. Just now I am dead broke, and a severe physical disability—laziness is the technical name—prevents me from doing manual labor. My dear Mr. Curtis, do you know of any way I can live here in idleness and—in silence?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE GIRL MYSTERY UNMASKS.

BRIDLE-PATH and Estella Curtis walked on the piazza, outside the hall. Music sounded from within, but Estella sighed.

"I shall be glad when it is over!" she declared.

"Are you not enjoying yourself?" the surveyor asked.

"As well as usual, in such a place; but what

does it all amount to? We come here, idle away our time, and get no reward. Don't understand me as being a strong-minded woman who has no interest in things akin to worldly vanity, but I am not in love with dancing. That's all!"

"I can echo your views heartily. I had rather fight grizzly bears than hop about like a toad in delirium. It is long since I have danced before, and I only came to-night because it was a special occasion. As a ball, said occasion seems a pronounced success."

"It is, I think, but I don't care for it. The Spanish girl does, however."

"Yes, and she is creating a good deal of curiosity."

"In which I share, to a certain degree. I can't imagine who she is."

Bridle-path was not anxious to talk about the Spanish girl. She had given marked attention to him, and he knew others must have observed it. He preferred Estella's company, and wished to have the Spanish girl drop out of sight and thought. He was about to change the subject when, turning as they reached a corner of the piazza, they found themselves face to face with the Spanish girl herself. She bowed slightly and rapidly said:

"I am not going to dance much more to-night, and would like to choose my partner for once. How is it, sir—will you dance with me?"

There was a certain air of possession in her manner which did not please Bridle-path. It was as if she felt sure of his company, and sure that he would desert Estella willingly for her. He was quite as willing to disappoint such expectations as to detect them.

"I shall have to ask to be excused. This dancing business is too frivolous to amuse me, and I shall indulge no more to-night."

There was brief silence, and the mask hid whatever change may have appeared in her face. Then she answered calmly:

"You are quite right as to the folly of dancing, though some do not agree with you. What fools these mortals be! I despise all this nonsense, but am going to dance once more. Why not come in and see me?"

Without waiting for an answer she hurried away.

"A queer young woman!" the surveyor commented.

"You have offended her," remarked Estella.

"How do you know?"
"How could it be otherwise? Men are accustomed to rebuffs in all grades of life so that such a thing would be less, but what woman could forgive the man who would not accept her invitation to dance? I advise you not to give your friend any chance to repay the debt."

"It is doubtful if I ever see her again."

With this careless remark Bridle-path changed the subject. They continued to walk on the piazza for a few minutes, and then went to the window to look into the ball-room. The Spanish girl had almost been forgotten, but the first couple they saw were that young lady and Mayor Allen. It was a great surprise, but Allen, catching sight of Bridle-path, first winked to him, and then seized a chance to come forward and say in a low tone:

"Don't let it be known in the other towns that I am such a fool as to dance, but the girl plainly asked me, and here I am. I imagined I was smart enough to learn who she was if I danced with her, but I am as much at sea as ever. She is devilish cute, and I am anxious to see her unmask."

He returned to his place, and the dance went on. He was not graceful in this line, and his frequent mistakes, and the very attentive manner of his partner, made them very much observed.

The dance ended, and all but one couple left the floor. At that moment the Spanish girl had made a pretense of arranging her mask anew, and had kept Allen by her side. The result was that they were soon standing alone between two rows of seated, smiling companions.

There was amusement in these smiles, and the mayor flushed. His own dignity was even dearer to him than that of the town, and he did not like to be represented with an unknown who had made so much comment.

She might be a queen's daughter, for all he knew, but—he was the mayor of Glory Eden.

The Spanish girl kept her hands busy until the pause had due effect, and then straightened up. Allen breathed a sigh of relief, thinking the embarrassment was about to end, but her voice suddenly sounded in tones so loud and clear as to be heard by all in the hall.

"Ladies and gentlemen—if such there are here," she uttered, "pressure of time will not allow me to remain with you any longer, or to be present when the general unmasking comes. Such being the case, I will, by the advice of my valued friend, the mayor, reveal my identity at once."

An outer dress fell from her person, revealing a plain, stout, short-skirted one under it, and then the mask was removed and tossed upon the floor.

A woman of remarkable face and form stood before them; one gifted with a marked amount

of bold beauty; and as she stood erect, looking around upon the others, in cool self-possession, her dark eyes glittering with something like triumph, even world-wise Bridle-path gazed almost breathlessly.

Not so the citizens of the town. Deep breaths were drawn; abrupt starts were made.

They recognized her!

"Cynthia Giblon!" gasped some one near the surveyor.

Mayor Allen stood speechless, dumfounded, his eyes actually wild in their glare. His face had flushed deeply with chagrin and shame, but it gradually grew pale with anger.

"You here!" he exclaimed, in a passion-thickened voice.

"I am here, my Lord Mayor!"

A bright, triumphant smile flashed over her face, and Bridle-path saw that he had been under no delusion when, just before, he mentally pronounced her beautiful. He had recognized the name, if not the face, and knew she was the daughter of the semi-outlaw of Lucifer Annex. He could partially understand what a blow it was to Allen, and the latter's appearance told the rest; the mayor was overwhelmed with mortification and rage.

"How dared you come?" he shouted.

"Why not? The invitation was free to all."

"It did not include you."

"And why not me?"

"Because you are Graf Giblon's daughter; because you are one of the accused people of Lucifer Annex."

The triumphant look gave place to one of bitterness.

"That is why I came; I knew I was not wanted here, and I was bound to come. I never harmed anybody in Glory Eden, but those here despise me, turn their patrician backs upon me, and look on me as one whose touch would be contamination!"

"Very properly, too, for—"

"You see what it has brought them! Despite their most bitter contempt I have attended their grand ball; I have danced with their young men and touched the hands of their young women; and, most of all, I have been the partner of the city's mayor in the only dance he has taken part in to-night!"

Again Allen's face flushed with mortification.

"You Jezebel!" he cried, "you shall repent this!"

"I have drawn first blood, anyhow, and can rest on my laurels. I want no more of you, fine people; I'll leave you and go back to the accused regions of Lucifer Annex, hoping you may all have pleasant dreams to-night; but this I want you to keep in mind: When the despised daughter of the island sets out, she can beat you all!"

The speaker bowed deeply, ironically, and was moving toward the door, when Allen spoke sharply:

"Stop!"

"My master is more of a man than I a dog; you are not the one, and I will not be the other."

"Stop! You have had all the say about coming here; we have something to say about your going. When you leave it will be for a prison cell. You are a prisoner!"

"What?"

"You are under arrest!"

"Upon what charge?"

"Disturbing the peace."

"I, arrested!"

Cynthia had paused. Her head was thrown back, and her eyes flashed with anger. She did not look less attractive, but it was beauty of a wild, lawless, dangerous kind.

"I will not be arrested!" she declared, suddenly turning toward the door.

The mayor shouted an order, and several men blocked the way of retreat. The men and women there were indignant that one like Cynthia should dare to mix with them, and the official found plenty of supporters at that moment. Seeing her retreat cut off, Allen added:

"Where is the sheriff? Let him arrest her at once!"

The girl almost panted with excitement and rage.

"You had not dare!" she cried.

"We do dare, and we shall do!"

With a quick movement the wild girl of the island drew a revolver.

"Let any one touch me at his peril!" she exclaimed. "I swear that I will use this weapon! Make way! I may be only a woman, but I am a Giblon, and I can maintain my rights. Even if I have humbled your arrogant pride, I have done nothing to merit arrest. Make way!"

She moved forward boldly, but the odds were too great against her. The men made a pretense of falling to each side to enable her to pass, but she had no sooner entered the passage than they sprung upon her, and the revolver was wrested away with no gentle hands. Even then the battle was not won, for she struggled in their grasp until the folly of effort and pride caused her to cease all effort. She stood with heaving bosom and glittering eyes, a captive in whom lay danger.

"Away with her to prison!" ordered Allen, hotly.

But at that moment the men nearest the girl were flung aside like children, and by her side

appeared a man of muscular build, whose eyes had a glare surpassing that seen in her own.

"The feller who touches the gal, dies!" he shouted.

Then another chorus of voices rose.

"Graf Giblon!"

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN WITH THE RIFLE.

BRIDLE-PATH leaned forward and looked with eager interest. The rude picture drawn by Red Ring of Lucifer Annex and its semi-outlawed people, and especially of Graf Giblon and his daughter, had been supplemented by Cythia's audacious conduct. Now, he was anxious to see Graf, himself.

The island-man was not a handsome person, but he was impressive. He was not tall, but Bridle-path never before had seen any one so broad of chest. Breadth, there, was remarkable; his shoulders were heavy, and his arms long and muscular, with great hairy hands. No one would have called him deformed, but his shape gave him a singular appearance, and would have drawn attention anywhere.

He was not prepossessing of face. Each feature was coarse, heavy, and brute-like. He had a very thick beard which, cut off at a length of about two inches, bristled out fiercely. That he was low, ignorant and vicious no one could doubt.

Estella had retreated when Cythia drew the revolver, and, having no one to care for, Bridle-path hastened to join the group.

If Cythia had created a sensation, Graf was not much behind her in that respect. He had entered the ball-room clad in old, coarse, dirt-begrimed clothes, and the long rifle on his arm, taken with his reputation, was enough to send the female masqueraders suddenly to the rear.

The outlaw's shout had caused those nearest Cythia to fall back a little, and after he spoke the next sentence no one was anxious to close up again.

"Yes," Graf added, "the man that touches the gal dies in his tracks!"

He held the rifle further forward, and some of the men seemed to think the ladies at the rear of the hall needed protection; they started to join those timid creatures. Even Mayor Allen held the big intruder in due respect, but he came to the front because he had to.

"See here, Giblon, what do you mean by such conduct?" he asked, severely.

"Mean? I mean that I'll shoot the varmint that tries ter arrest my gal!" fiercely declared the outlaw.

"But she came here—"

"More fool, she! I'd as soon swaller p'izon as ter mix with sech carrion as you've got hyer, but no woman ever had brains, yet. I kin fight you all, but I wouldn't take a friendly hand ef you was ter carry a bag o' gold-dust in it. But Cythia is a woman, an' she's done the fool-act ter perfection. I admit that, but it ain't nothin' ter be arrested fer. Your ball-notices said free ter all, an'—"

"But people of Lucifer Annex were not included."

"Why didn't you say so, then?"

"I didn't suppose any one there would have the assurance to come."

"Why not? Ain't my gal as good as anybody hyer?"

No one answered.

Graf raised the hammer of his rifle.

"Ef anybody hyer thinks she ain't, let him say so!" the outlaw added, in a voice which made shivers go chasing up and down the spines of the more timid men before him.

"But, Giblon," urged Allen, moderately, "your girl has come here and made it very unpleasant for us—"

"Yes; I danced with you!" Cythia retorted.

Again the mayor flushed.

"Wal, is anybody hankerin' ter arrest her?" demanded brawny Graf.

"We ought to—"

"Ef anybody is so sot on doin' his duty, let him select his grave an' then go right on with the arrest!" advised the outlaw, with unpleasant suggestiveness.

"See here, Giblon, don't imagine you can come here and kick up a row. Nobody's going to harm your girl, but your treatment will depend on how you act. We shall allow no dictation, but as you are here to exercise paternal authority, I will waive the duty of arresting the girl; you can take her and go. But if you or she disturbs the peace in Glory Eden, you will be arrested at once. Keep this in mind!"

"I thought you'd take water."

"You impudent scoundrel! Give me no more of your back talk!" cried the mayor thoroughly aroused at last.

"I shall talk when I please, an' say what I please. No critter hyer kin give orders ter me, an' any one who wants ter hev a scrap hez only jest got ter hop on. But ef yer blood ain't sizlin' red hot, an' yer ain't hankerin' fer gore, I'll go away. Cythia goes with me out o' this buildin', and the man who tries ter molest her will die right whar he is; but after she's wal outside she kin go ter Halifax or any other place. A gal o' mine who will disgrace me by

comin' hyer ain't wu'th keepin' in grub an' clothes."

The outlaw turned his fierce, glaring gaze upon Cythia, but did not seem to intimidate her much.

"Don't talk nonsense!" she indifferently answered, and again moved toward the door.

Graf kept his place, rolling his barbarian eyes about so as to watch every one and make sure he was not to be attacked, but when Cythia had passed the threshold, he turned and slouched after her, his rifle across his arm, and one finger resting on the trigger.

Bridle-path was near a window where he could look down to the street, and he improved the chance. The girl emerged from the lower hall, crossed the street and started westward. Once she looked back, and saw Graf slouching after her. Further than that she made no effort, nor did he try to join her. Walking a few feet in the rear he went on with his peculiar gait, and the singular couple gradually disappeared from view.

It seemed as if they had no sense of triumph or defeat—whichever they thought their condition to be—no feeling in common, and nothing to talk about.

"Strange pair!" Bridle-path mechanically muttered.

He was the first person to speak, for every one else seemed under a spell, but the silence was soon broken, and then all had something to say. Brave men are always to be found in profusion when danger is over, and the mayor's fellow-citizens began to tell in chorus what he should have done.

"Why in thunder didn't you do it, yourselves?" the angry official demanded.

"You were the leader here."

"Right! Not one of you dared put in a word edgeways. Don't let me hear any more idle talk; if you want Graf Giblon, go over to Lucifer Annex and get him."

This advice cooled the eleventh-hour heroes, and they joined in a new book of lamentations.

"Our ball has been made a dead failure!"

"And all on account of that Giblon girl."

"And we have all danced with her!"

"Even the mayor!"

The little aristocracy of Glory Eden looked at each other in a manner that spoke louder than words. Cythia, the despised, had been among them and their sisters and sweethearts; and there was no use of denying that she had been the belle of the evening. No one else had created so much notice, and the men were dismayed when they remembered how they had contested for the honor of dancing with her.

None of their regrets sprung from high principle, and many would have shown no aversion to a private flirtation with the handsome island girl, but she was Graf Giblon's daughter; the town had long before set the seal of its condemnation upon her, and, like other men and women, these Edenites were slaves to outward show.

As for the fact that she had boldly gained entrance to the hall and carried such a high hand, it was humiliating to an extreme.

Mayor Allen was the most demoralized man there, and he felt that he was ruined. He had danced with the Giblon girl—he would not dance with those he had known and respected for years. He could not recover his self-possession, but, after awhile, did succeed in having dancing resumed, but it was a sorry attempt at gayety, and the party soon broke up.

Bridle-path walked back to the hotel earlier than they, but not in the unhappy frame of mind peculiar to the others. He was rather amused by the downfall of Glory Eden's pride, and had gained fresh interest in Cythia.

He determined to go over to Lucifer Annex before many days.

At the door of Red Ring's establishment he encountered a second man who was about to enter.

"This is the hotel, isn't it?" the stranger asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Just the place I want. I'll spread the name Wesley Charles Eastman on the records, alias register, and proceed to live on the fat of the land. Are you a citizen?"

"Never saw the place until two days ago."

"I am a stranger in Zion, but like well as far as I've gone. It's a great place to make money. I landed here dead broke, and now my pockets are filled to the hatches. I'll take our host's best room and put on style to suit, all through."

They had entered the hotel, and Mr. Eastman proceeded to put his name on the register in an elaborate fashion.

"Give me an A 1 room," he ordered, "and trot out a cigar as quick as you can; a Havana."

Having received the latter article he walked over to Bridle-path again.

"My first smoke to-day," he explained. "You know what that means to one accustomed to the glorious weed. I've been starving for it, but I was broke—dead broke."

"You were lucky to raise money."

"I should remark."

"Ability to do it is a rare art. May I ask if it is any secret how you got on your feet again?"

Mr. Eastman smiled contentedly.

"You may ask, but, much as I dislike to refuse, I can't answer; it is a secret. However, I knew a string whi' I could pull; I pulled, and money rattled into my pockets. I—made it—in trade!"

The last words were oddly spoken. Then he added more briskly:

"Come over to a chair and let's talk."

Bridle-path was not prepossessed in favor of this man, but he did not refuse the invitation. To reach the chair, only a few of which were visible, they had to go to an alcove. As they turned the corner both saw that another man was there; a muscular fellow in common mining clothes, who had fallen asleep in his seat and lay with his head resting on the table before him.

Still further out on the table lay one of his brawny arms, bared to the elbow, and upon it showed a red mark, so large and so deep of color that Wesley Charles Eastman's attention was at once drawn to it. He stopped short and looked attentively.

"We are not alone, you see," Bridle-path remarked.

Eastman did not answer or move for several seconds, but, at last, he raised a puzzled face to the surveyor.

"Who is this?"

"A miner of the town; Strawberry Sam, they call him. If I've heard his real name, it's escaped me."

"That's a queer brand on his arm."

"Yes; the strawberry mark of tradition and jest appears here as a thing of reality."

"A confounded queer brand!"

"So I thought when I saw it."

"He wears one sleeve like a Christian, but the other is cut off at the elbow. Strange!"

Eastman's forehead was knit in a thoughtful frown, and he spoke mechanically. It was doubtful if he heard anything that Bridle-path said; he was regarding the miner intently. Possibly this gaze influenced Strawberry Sam even in sleep, for he suddenly awoke.

He started up partially, returned the regard fixed upon him, and then again threw the marked arm forward in a prominent position. The surveyor did not interest him, but Eastman was the subject of the fixed scrutiny he always bestowed upon strangers.

Bridle-path introduced them, and Sam rose and shook hands in his eccentric style, his left arm dangling across their clasped hands.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY OF THE RED BRAND.

LIKE every one else who experienced that peculiar greeting, Eastman looked down. The birthmark confronted him. The puzzled look remained on his face.

"You see it, do yer?" Strawberry Sam questioned.

"Yes," returned Wesley Charles, mechanically.

"Did you ever see it afore?"

"No."

The miner's gaze was of the same devouring kind always shown by him on such occasions, but the lack of agitation, alarm or enmity on Eastman's part was convincing. He relaxed his hold with a sigh.

"Not yet!" he muttered.

There was a brief silence, not wholly free from awkwardness. Bridle-path expected the miner to follow up his customary opening by reference to his search for an unknown man, but, as this was not done, the surveyor suggested that they sit down.

"You are a stranger in Glory Eden, ain't you?" asked Strawberry Sam.

"Just arrived."

"Goin' inter business?"

"I may, later. My line of business"—there was a twinkle in Eastman's eyes—"is in the way of financial operations."

"No better place kin be found."

"Granted! Since I came I have realized on sundry investments handsomely; a per cent. of gain, by the way, unprecedented in ordinary work, since I have turned *nothing* into a good living. As a financier I am away up the scale by a majority of several octaves. True, I don't handle millions. Why should I? They would get away from me. I might gain one day, but would lose the next. The man who invests zero minus nothing, and pulls out a per cent. of gain not to be represented in figures is the true genius. I am the daddy financier!"

Puffing his cigar, and leaning back in the chair as if he owned all of Glory Eden, Wesley Charles Eastman was the picture of supreme content. He was an interesting study to Bridle-path, though scarcely one of pleasant nature.

The constant references to the fact that he had managed to improve his financial condition since he arrived at Glory Eden, were all so suggestive that, taken in connection with certain other peculiarities in his manner, it could not be doubted that he was one upon whom the demands of honesty placed few restraints.

Strawberry Sam heard Wesley's long speech gravely.

"So you're a financier?"

"Yes."

"I don't know nothin' erbout that business."

"I do!" quoth Wesley Charles, grimly.

"Do you deal in minin' stocks?"

"I mine some. Yes; I'm a great digger, but I prefer brain to pick, any time. Friend, why in thunder have you got one sleeve sawed off at the elbow?"

The miner's mind returned to his hobby.

"I'm lookin' fer a man!"

"Oh! are you?"

"When I see him, I want him ter see that mark."

"Why?"

"So he will try ter kill me!"

"The blazes you do!"

Eastman was surprised out of his careless serenity, and again looked wonderingly at the birthmark.

"Thar's a man who's done a great wrong," Sam explained, his eyes glittering. "I don't know who he is, but I won't never die satisfied unless I've found out. I'm huntin' him, an' I'll find him hyer in this town, fer a fortune-teller told me so. When he sees that birthmark he'll know I'm on his trail, an' then he'll try ter kill me. That'll show me who he is."

"Suppose he kills you without your once getting sight of him?"

"He kill me? Why, he can't! See the muscle in them arms; see the size o' them hands, stranger."

"Suppose he hid behind a rock and fired at you when your back was turned?"

"That won't happen; I feel sure I shall get the best o' him; I ain't a bit afraid."

This simple confidence was not to be shaken, and Eastman did not press the point.

"I believe I've heard of that marked arm before," he observed, after a pause.

"You hev? Whar? When?"

"It's an odd story. Some years ago, when I was East, I was one night invited to dine with a party of men on the evening before Christmas. All of the party were well-educated men who had just begun business life. It was a crowd a little given to fast life, and a good deal of wine was consumed. We grew jovial, and wit ruled the hour. In the midst of the festivities one man told a story. He was exhilarated, but not in the least intoxicated, and I feel sure all he said was true.

"I will try to tell the story as near as possible in his own words.

"This Christmas reminds me of that two years ago. I was just out of college, and feeling around for a business chance to make my mark. A dozen of us college men agreed to meet and spend the evening as we are spending it now.

"We met; we drank, and were merry.

"We had a private room at a hotel, and a sleek little waiter of French extraction. At one side of the room was one of those square holes in the wall used for passing in dishes and the like, and some man outside was doing his duty. Whenever we wanted a new course, it came through that hole in the wall, but we never saw the other man in full; only his big, bare arms.

"We had much sport over those arms. There was no good reason for this, except that we were so filled with wine that we mistook nonsense for wit. Many a joke we flung at the unseen workman, or, rather, his arms, for they were what we referred to.

"If he heard our jests he gave no sign.

"Later, our waiter left the room for a moment, and while he was away the brawny arms reappeared with another dish. One of our number, a gay young fellow, sprung up with the remark that he would act the waiter.

"He went to the opening. His starting point was such that he approached diagonally across the room, and, even if he had stooped, he could not have seen the man in the next room. Our friend was all life and animation; assuming an absurd manner to fit, ironically, his assumed character, he was about to take the dish upon which the cook—if such the other man was—still kept his hold.

"Suddenly, however, we saw our friend start, stop short, stare at the arms, grow pale and stand fixed. Then he staggered back and fell on a sofa.

"We thought it a clever piece of nonsense, and shouted our appreciation uproariously. The cook vanished, the real waiter returned, we were duly served; but still our friend lay motionless on the sofa. We had guyed him as only young fellows will, but a more thoughtful member of our party finally went to his side.

"He had fainted!

"At first we thought him dead, and all our hilarity died away; but he was only unconscious. We brought him to, but he lay shivering and shaking, and would only say, in a husky voice: "Take me home!"

"He was unable to go alone, and myself and a second friend obeyed his request. He went to bed at once. We wanted to call a doctor, but he would not allow it. I asked him for an explanation of his strange conduct, and he attributed all to the liquor he had imbibed.

"I believe the wine was responsible in a measure, but only as a contributory cause; the fact was, the man had received a terrible shock. I found it out before morning. He pitifully asked not to be left alone, and it was I who remained with him.

"I lay down on a lounge, but watched him closely. He lay pale and silent, but, now and then, would shiver as if with ague.

"Fright had deadened the effects of the liquor, but he had enough so that it finally overcame both him and his fright, and he fell asleep. It was not drunken slumber—far from it. Only a short time had passed when he began to mutter:

"The birthmarked arm! Just Heaven! the red brand! I am lost, lost! He will hunt me down! Where can I flee? What will save me from him?"

"Again and again these words were uttered, and, wondering greatly, I lay and watched. Finally, I, too, fell asleep. I was awakened by a wild scream, and saw my companion sitting up in bed. He had had a nightmare, and was frightened almost out of his wits. Still, he would explain nothing.

"Once, later, he awoke me in the same way, and my Christmas opened stormily, but morn-ing finally came. The last two hours he rested easily, and, by breakfast time, was calm, though he remained pale and weak.

"That day I asked him bluntly for an explanation, but he would tell nothing. I asked him why the red mark on the cook's arm should affect him so. He denied that such was the cause. I reminded him that he had raved all night about the mark; then he closed his lips and would say no more. After breakfast he made an excuse to leave the house; he went, and disappeared as utterly as if the earth had swallowed him up.

"Finding that he had gone so strangely I determined to see the birthmarked cook. I went, and, lo! a second mystery! The cook, a plain, prosaic man, had vanished as completely as the college man. Neither ever came back. Friends hunted for both, but in vain. I say friends, but the cook, a new-comer, had only new acquaintance. There was a whisper of foul play, but it produced no results.

"Such," concluded the story-teller, "was my Christmas of two years ago; a day as wild and mysterious as any I ever experienced."

"Here," added Wesley Eastman, "is the narrative of our friend as near as I can remember it, and that's all I know about that strawberry-marked arm."

He ceased, and Strawberry Sam leaped up like a creature operated by springs. Grasping Eastman's arm in a painful clutch, he hoarsely demanded:

"That man! Who is he? Whar is he?"

Even cool Wesley Charles drew back from that violent explosion.

"I don't know."

"It is false! You know all! You know, an' you shall tell me, or you are a dead man. Speak out! Speak out, critter, an' save yer life!"

CHAPTER VII.

RICHARD, LONG SOUGHT AND MUCH WANTED.

AFTER Eastman's story was fairly under way Strawberry Sam had raised his big hands and covered his face, leaving only interstices through which he could peer at the speaker. Thus, his expression was lost to them, and the discernible wildness of his eyes was nothing new. Little as was to be seen, Bridle-path suspected that the miner was greatly excited, and the final outburst did not surprise him.

Wesley Charles was surprised, but was equal to the emergency; he had seen too many stormy scenes in the past to be frightened by Sam's violence or his threat.

Quickly drawing a revolver he covered the miner and exclaimed:

"Let go! You are welcome to all I know, but you can't bulldoze me. Sit down! Release my arm, or you, not I, will be the dead man!"

Sam dropped into a seat at once.

"Don't blame me!" he urged, "but I'm so anxious ter git all the facts. I was that cook!"

"Ah! I suspected it."

"Tell me now, who an' whar is that man?"

"I don't know. He was an entire stranger to me. I was a stranger in that region. I went there, fell in with the crowd, and, as they were not exclusive, was invited to dine. I did so, but could not have called one-half of them by name when the festivities were over. I give you my word of honor that I don't know the name of the man who told the story. I never saw him after that day."

"But can't he be traced?"

"I know of no way. Now, be calm. Your eyes startle me with their wild and vindictive eagerness. Ye gods of heathendom! I'd hate to have ye on my track! You know all I know with one exception. This I have purposely saved until the last. When the story-teller aforesaid had finished, some asked the name of the young man who had fainted at sight of the birthmarked arm. He refused to tell—"

"An' you didn't hear?"

"Wrong! A flippant member of our company spoke up and declared that he knew the name. Strawberry Sam, I don't know the merits of the case between you and the man who fainted, but I'll go my length and tell all. The name was Richard Knox!"

"Richard Knox!" repeated the miner, in fierce joy. "At last! atlast! I know the name;

now for the man! Richard Knox! Wide the world must be ter hide him from my vengeance. I'll hunt him down! Richard Knox!"

Again and again he repeated the name, machine-like, and Eastman thought of what he had said before—that he would not like to have this man on his track. He interrupted the muttering at last.

"Now that I've been so frank, stranger, tell me wbv you want to find a certain party?"

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"It's out o' the question."

"Perhaps if you were as frank as I've been, it would give me some idea—recall something new to my mind—that would help you."

"Now I've got the name I don't need no help. The fortune-teller said he'd come hyer, an' I hev only ter wait fer him."

"You simpleton! don't you see he can change his name?"

"I don't think he will."

"Anyhow, give us the story of your vendetta. It would be of rare interest—"

"No!" declared the miner. "I won't tell nobody. I never hev, an' I won't begin now. I'll jest keep on showin' that birthmark ter all I see, an' Richard Knox will run inter the trap yet. I'm 'most sart'in his looks will betray him when he sees the mark, but ef he's got too much sand ter weaken, why, he'll try ter kill me, on the sly, an' then I'll hev him."

"Our friend is a second Ajax, who is defying the lightning on the same old plan."

This comment came from Bridle-path, who had not spoken for a long time. He had tipped his chair back against the wall, and, smoking calmly, had watched and listened in what seemed lazy indifference.

"I am a little weak in mythology and don't recollect which of the two won in the old Graeco-Roman wrestle, Ajax or the lightning; but in this case I'm betting on the electric bolt. Coax a man to try and kill you on the sly! Say, perhaps you like that fodder, but you may count me out!"

The miner did not answer. A more serious argument to convince him that he was foolishly jeopardizing his life, or would be if his man appeared, would have fallen on his ears fruitlessly. He was so wedded to his one idea that nothing could shake him.

Having learned all he could, he felt that he wanted to be alone to think it over, and left the hotel. Eastman watched him depart with curiosity.

"A queer fellow, by Jove!" he then declared.

"All men are queer," Bridle-path answered.

"But all are not man-hunters. Zounds! I wouldn't care to have Ajax hunting me!"

"He would not be a mean foe."

"No one is that when he seeks your life; the smallest and weakest foe is enough to give one the trembles. Even in old days, when weapons were rude, boyish David slew mighty Goliath, and now the modern revolver makes weak men and strong more nearly matched. Ajax carries a revolver, and his strength is that of a giant; he has all the requisites for a hard fight. I tell you it's no fun to be hunted. To one's feverish imagination every rock, and bush, and elevation, and depression, has a hidden foe; the marked man is always expecting to feel the sting of bullet or the sweep of knife. Seriously, I pity Sam's man, and if Richard Knox is the man, I wish Richard's name had not passed my lips to-night."

"Possibly Richard will be able to look out for himself."

Eastman was unusually serious, but Bridle-path's manner was quiet and unconcerned.

Eastman was weary after a day of traveling, and he now retired. The night had advanced to two o'clock, and the surveyor decided to follow his example. He went to the outer room, and found the landlord very busy with the crowd of men who always gave their patronage at the fag end of the night. Just then a Chinese servant came to him with a message.

"The lady up-stairs wants to see you."

"Didn't you tell her I was too busy to leave?"

"Yes; but she says she must see you, at once."

"Did you ever see any one like a woman?" exclaimed Red Ring, uplifting both hands. "She came a few minutes ago, a perfect stranger to me and to the town; and sent word before she was fairly settled that she wanted to see me. I returned the answer that I was very busy, and must ask her to wait until morning. Now, she reiterates the summons. I tell you, gents, when a woman sets out to do a thing, she's awful. The last one I crossed in her wishes just took a knife and slashed all the furniture in her room to bits. It mustn't happen again."

His gaze fell upon Bridle-path; his face brightened and he added:

"Say, old man, go up there and represent yourself as my partner. Help me out! Smooth down her feathers, and feed her corn and taffy. Her cackling must be stopped, or all the poultry will leave my roost."

The surveyor could not resist this pathetic appeal, and he went up at once. The Chinaman showed him the room, and he entered.

In the middle of the room stood a lady, and

it needed but little time for him to decide that she was too much excited to sit down. She was both nervous and angry, and his reception was far from amiable.

"So you've come at last?" she began, sharply.

"Yes, madam—"

"Do you usually keep guests waiting in such fashion as this, ignoring all their wishes?"

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Westcott, but there has been a rush of business—"

"That is no excuse; it is your business to attend to your customers. I suppose you think I can be put off because I am a woman, but I want you to understand that women know more about business than men. I know my rights, too, and will maintain them!"

Hiding his amusement, Bridle-path bowed meekly.

"I am at your service now, madam."

"Because I have compelled you; but let that pass. I want to ask you certain questions. Is there a man living in this town named Richard Knox?"

The surveyor's eyes opened wider. He was one who could control his expression wonderfully, but the question was a surprise—and something more.

"I know of no such man," he returned, quietly.

"He must be fifty years old; is tall, slender, fine-looking, aristocratic. Very likely he is gray-haired by this time; I haven't seen him for twenty years."

"I don't think he lives here."

"Don't you know?"

"Ours is a floating population; men are here to-day and gone to-morrow; and vice versa. He may have come recently."

"He came twenty years ago."

"The town is hardly as old as that."

"I know what I am talking about."

She was not an amiable woman; this person who wished to find Richard Knox. She was tall and well-formed; her unusually abundant hair was very black except where it was marked with gray; her face had a kind of bold beauty, but was strongly marked with lines which might have indicated trouble, passion or dissipation, or a little of each; and she was fashionably dressed.

If Strawberry Sam had been present he would have been impressed by the fact that she was inquiring for a man whose name was, since the last hour, familiar to him, but while she represented Richard Knox as fifty years old, the Richard Knox of Eastman's story was not over thirty.

Bridle-path mildly observed:

"If you have financial business with the person named—"

"I have not."

"If personal, we shall be glad to help you—"

"Then find Richard Knox!"

"How can we find what is not here?"

"Listen! You may be deceiving me purposefully, or you may be sincere. Let me enlighten you further, and see if you know him under another name. Knox was one of the very earliest settlers, but then saw fit to call himself Richard Mayo. He was a partner of one Charles G. Curtis in the Black Bear Mine."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MARKED COAT.

BRIDLE-PATH looked supremely astonished.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed.

"And why impossible?" Mrs. Westcott asked.

"I have heard of that man, but—"

"You supposed his real name was Mayo?"

"Yes."

"Wrong; he is Richard Knox."

If Mrs. Westcott had been observing to a proper degree she might have seen that this statement produced more than mere surprise in Bridle-path's mind. Cool as he was, he now showed something akin to startled wonder and uncertainty. But the woman thought only of her own affairs.

"What kind of a man is this Mayo? In what light is he regarded by his townsmen? Is he honest or dishonest? Would the citizens be likely to believe implicitly in him, or—"

"Richard Mayo, madam, has been dead for nearly twenty years!" the surveyor explained.

"Impossible!"

"Why so?"

"I simply mean that it is incredible; in short, that 'tis a blow to me if he is dead."

"You will find but few persons in Glory Eden who can tell you more about Mayo than that he was once partner of Charles G. Curtis in the Black Bear Mine. The mine was fatal to Mayo. He sunk all his money in it, for it was a dead failure; and wound up by falling down a shaft and killing himself. That was in the infancy of this town, and I've heard it said that Mr. Curtis is the only person here who was an inhabitant when Mayo was alive."

"This is a great disappointment!" declared Mrs. Westcott, and her expression confirmed the assertion.

"You would surprise people here by stating that Mayo's real name was Richard Knox," pursued Bridle-path, slowly. "Can you prove it?"

"To my own satisfaction, yes."

"Who was Knox?"

"That I must decline to state."

"Could you not learn of him through his family? Had he relatives?"

"There was a younger Richard Knox, his nephew; but I am not interested in him. This man Curtis—who and what is he? I've heard he is still a mine-owner, here, and I had the impression that Mayo was a partner. Tell me of Curtis!"

"He is one of our foremost citizens; owner of a rich mine, and wealthy. No one here is more respected."

Mrs. Westcott meditated. Since she heard that Mayo was dead the look of disappointment had not once left her face, and the surveyor was observing enough to suspect that she had hazarded all on a single chance and had been left by the casting of the die; in brief, that she was now at the end of all visible resources. Fashionably as she was dressed, he would have hazarded something that hers was an empty purse.

"I must see this Charles Curtis, to-morrow," she finally spoke, more in soliloquy than for Bridle-path's ears; and her forehead was contracted in thought.

Suddenly she aroused and turned to her companion.

"I am very much obliged for your kindness, sir," she added. "I hope you will not think I was too hasty when I asked to see you, for I was suffering from a very painful tooth, and it upset my nervous system. I hope you will overlook any hasty words on my part."

She smiled sweetly, and Bridle-path bowed and made a suitable reply. Really, he was thinking:

"Red Ring will have to give credit to this woman, or send her adrift. This gracious air means that she has no cash, and the Mayo matter leaves her without means of getting any. Wealth is a wild steed of the prairie; poverty is a yoked ox."

Descending to the landlord's presence, he made a full report.

"You have the history of Mayo straight, as we know it here," Red Ring remarked. "He's been dead almost twenty years, and his grave is over on the hill, in the cemetery."

"What about her claim that he was named Knox, instead of Mayo?"

"My friend, I'm not sure that any man in Colorado but me is sailing under his true name. Why, you may not be Bridle-path, in fact, but John de Smith. Mayo died long before I came to Glory Eden, and I know nothing about him more than you do. As you told this high-flying dame up-stairs, her source of further information must be Charles G. Curtis. If I knew Mayo was Chris Columbus, I wouldn't tell that wild and woolly female. Let's turn in, old man!"

Bridle-path went up to his room, entered and locked the door carefully. Then he began to pace the floor in a slow and mechanical fashion. Evidently his mind was not upon what he did, and he kept it up for nearly half an hour. When he paused it was to mutter a partial summary of his thoughts:

"I have come into a very hot-bed by pitching my tent in Glory Eden. There is great demand for Richard Knox. Mrs. Westcott wants the elder man for some unknown reason; Strawberry Sam wants the younger for sacrifice. A most interesting state of affairs, upon my word! If either Richard is found it will go hard with him, I fear, but if he isn't found, why, our hunters will beat their wing against the empty air for nothing. Make a note of it!"

The surveyor removed his coat, went to the light and held it up where it was plainly revealed.

Upon the inside of the coat, sewed under the collar where the makers of more pretentious garments of the kind put their firm-name, was an oblong piece of cloth upon which was marked the following:

R. J. KNOX.

Taking his knife, Bridle-path neatly detached this tag and held it in the blaze of the lamp until it was consumed. Upon his vest was a similar article which he disposed of in the same way. He also looked his other garments over, evidently to make sure that there was no other, and then drew a breath of relief.

"I shall be safer now," he observed.

He went to bed and was soon asleep.

In the morning Mrs. Westcott was the sweetest-tempered woman in Glory Eden; in fact, she was more amiable than Mr. Ring. She sent for him and confessed that she was short of money. She had expected to get some as soon as she arrived in town, but had been disappointed. However, she would either borrow during the day or telegraph "home" for funds. She hoped this would be satisfactory to Mr. Ring.

She smiled more sweetly than ever, but Red Ring would have sold twenty such smiles for five dollars. His instinct for money was well developed, but that for smiles was dwarfed.

Nevertheless, not being a harsh man, he consented to delay, and went down-stairs, where every one was talking about the ball of the previous night.

The audacity of Cynthia Giblon astonished all, and nobody could think of anything else.

Mrs. Westcott made her toilet as elaborately as possible, and left the hotel. She had a call to make. She aspired to make it by way of a carriage, which her means would not allow her to do; and her mind was filled with disappointment and bitterness. Having made due inquiry she found Charles G. Curtis's house, and was about to ring the bell when the door was opened by Estella, who was just going out.

She paused with an air of polite inquiry, but Mrs. Westcott stood staring at her in surprise and uncertainty. Doubt and confusion made her oblivious to the passage of time, and Estella spoke politely:

"Excuse me, but whom do you wish to see?"

"You—who are you?" Mrs. Westcott demanded.

"My name is Estella Curtis."

The visitor's face grew sober.

"Pardon me," she replied, "but I thought you resembled some one else. May I ask if Mr. Curtis is in?"

"He is, and I will notify him that you wish to see him."

A servant was in the hall, and Estella first sent the message, and then conducted the caller to the parlor. There the latter was left alone.

"A mystery!" she thought. "Whence comes this resemblance? Why does Curtis's daughter look like—But I must study on it. The resemblance, if one of chance, is remarkable. It will repay study, though there may be nothing in it. I'll see!"

Mr. Curtis came. He was a polite and courteous gentleman, despite his eccentricity, and Mrs. Westcott was received according to his custom.

"I have called," she explained, "to ask after a friend of mine, of whom I believe you can tell me."

"I shall be pleased to do so, if possible."

"His name is—Richard Mayo."

The mine-owner's face assumed a startled expression. He looked at the woman in silence, and it was plain that his courtesy had received a set-back.

"I am told that he is your partner," she added, losing no change in his face.

"Why, madam, he died twenty years ago!" he finally exclaimed.

"I have been told that, too, but it seems hardly possible. I cannot realize it."

"Such is the fact."

The visitor sighed deeply. She did not intend to act an aggressive part, for the meanest charity from Curtis was all she could expect. She hated Richard Mayo for the lack of consideration for her he had shown by dying, but it was necessary to feign sorrow. Mr. Curtis watched her closely. He noted the favorable signs, but hardly dared to hope for anything but trouble.

"How did he die, sir?"

"He and I were working the Black Bear Mine together. He fell down a shaft and was killed instantly."

"This is a great blow to me!" moaned the lady.

"Were you a relative, madam?"

"Did you never hear him speak of Daisy Westcott?"

"I think not."

"I was his cousin, but the bond between us was like that of brother and sister. Oh! we were much dearer than cousins usually are. Don't think from this that we ever meditated matrimony; it was the unalloyed love of brother and sister. And now he is gone!"

Daisy produced her handkerchief, and, presumably, deluged it with tears; at least, she hid and wiped her eyes. It would have impressed a cynic as inconsistent that she should grieve so deeply for a man twenty years gone from life, when she had only just set out to find him; but Curtis did not think of this. He only wondered if there was a sting back of all this—a "confidence game." He had not forgotten his late interview in the old mine; this weeping Daisy might be wiser than she assumed to be.

"I regret that you should be met with such bad news," the mine-owner remarked, awkwardly.

"He was like a brother!" she reiterated.

"A good man! Let us hope he is in a happier land."

"Tell me all about him."

Curtis told a plain, simple story. If he spoke the truth he had never failed in his duty to his sometime partner. When he was done Mrs. Westcott sat silent and dejected.

"Can I aid you further?" Curtis asked.

"His death places me in a painful position. I have been ill; I am far from well now. Have you a home for the poor, here, where I could remain for a week or two?"

"Pardon me, but are you in reduced circumstances?"

"My pride must not control me now. I am penniless."

Mr. Curtis meditated for a moment, only. Then he took a hundred dollars from his pocket.

"Pray accept this," he said; "not as if from me, but from Mayo."

Daisy hesitated; she pretended to weep again;

she said a few grateful words; she—she did not refuse the money. She accepted it.

Then she said a few more grateful words, and, after a little further delay, went from Curtis's presence, her head bowed in grief as she thought of the dead man who had been like a brother. But her hold on the hundred dollars never relaxed.

CHAPTER IX. ROARING BILL.

BRIDLE-PATH took his rifle and strolled away from the town.

He wanted to see Glory Eden and vicinity fully, something he had not been able to do during his brief stay in the town; and he climbed the high hills to the west until a good view was obtained. There was enough to reward him, for Nature was at her best around the valley. There was no lack of trees and vegetation, and, though rocks and cliffs were common, they did not monopolize everything.

After awhile the young man rose and walked on toward the southwest. He took the direction simply by chance, and it was practically a surprise when he suddenly came out and saw a land of interest before him.

First of all there was a lake lying in a bowl of the mountains, and submerging several hundred acres. In the center of the lake was an island—a long, narrow belt of land, so thoroughly wooded that, from where Bridle-path stood, only an occasional glimpse of land could be obtained.

It was "Lucifer Annex," the home of the Giblons and their kindred spirits.

The casual view the surveyor had obtained of it on a former occasion had left only a memory of the rare beauty of the scene. Now, it was different. He knew the history of the people; knew that there were upward of a score of men and women there who were reputed to be outlaws. True, their history was unknown, and they never had infringed upon the laws of Glory Eden, but their mere looks, report said, branded them as law-breakers.

Recollection of Cythia's bold escapade was still a source of amusement, and Bridle-path was so interested in the ostracized people that he determined to go nearer to the island. At one place it lay not far from the mainland, for a point of the latter put out into the lake to within a hundred yards of the island.

He descended the slope and reached the larger end of the point. Beyond, there was no cover of rocks or trees, and he stopped to consider the advisability of going further. The island was so heavily wooded that he was gaining no additional view, and he might not be rewarded by going out on the point.

While he stood hesitating he heard footsteps and turned to see three men approaching.

They were rough of dress and personal appearance, and he at once set them down as citizens of Lucifer Annex.

After that one glance he gave them no more attention, hoping they would pass on without speaking, but this they did not seem inclined to do.

"Hullo, Pretty Boy!" exclaimed one, in a coarse voice and offensive manner.

Bridle-path turned and nodded quietly.

"Good-morning, sir," he replied.

"Takin' a look at the island, hey?"

"Yes."

"What d'ye think of it?"

"A pleasant place."

"How erbout Glory Eden?"

"All right, as far as I know."

"What're you spyin' 'round hyer, fer?" more abruptly demanded the man, his air becoming hostile.

"I am not spying."

"You lie! You're sizin' up the island!"

"Haven't I a right to do so?"

"No, you hain't, an' what's more, you can't! You belong at Glory Eden, an' you nor no other galoot thar can't come monkeyin' 'round these parts. You see fit ter despise us. That's all right; we don't keer a red whether you do or don't; but you've got ter keep your side o' the fence. Don't come nosin' erround hyer, er out goes yer binnacle lamp. See?"

"I take it you belong at the island?"

"I do. I'm Roarin' Bill Blood. This hyer critter with the eye of an eagle is Center-shot Steve; this is Phin Hicks. We are a big trio, an' don't you forgit it; we're holy terrors, we be; an' we're bosses no man kin lead ter water. Yes; we live at the island."

"Why don't you stay there?"

"Cause we don't see fit ter."

"I don't see fit to stay at Glory Eden!"

Roaring Bill's manner had been offensive, insolent and aggressive in the extreme, and Bridle-path did not see fit to be bullied. They counted three, and he was but one, but he did not intend to cringe before them. His boldness, however, seemed to astonish Roaring Bill. That person's eyes and mouth opened wide. Then he added fictitious evidence of amazement to what was genuine. He rubbed his eyes and bored his ears with his fingers, and grimaced until Center-shot Steve and Phin Hicks roared with mirth.

"Bill is a funny dog!" quoth Mr. Hicks, poking Stephen in the ribs, playfully.

"Critters!" cried Bill, tragically, "da yer

hear that? Do yer hear this Pretty Boy talk? He's sassy, he is! What shall we do about it, my heroes?"

"My advice is, do nothing," returned Bridle-path. "I will add to what I said before that I come and go where I please. I believe your gang has the right of possession to the island, and as I know of no earthly reason why I should go there, I will not intrude. Don't fancy, however, that you own the mainland. I am here; I have a right here; I shall stay as long as I see fit. I don't covet a quarrel with you or any other man, valiant William, but your grotesque antics and hostile manner may as well be shelled."

"Hello! hello! do you give us orders?"

"Not an order, sir!"

"That's right; don't do it. If you tried I'd lick you out o' them pooty little pumps you wear. Dunno but I'll lick ye, anyhow," Bill added, meditatively.

"Better attend to your own business, and pass on."

"Afore we go, I want ter know why you're monkeyin' errround this island?"

"You weary me. I have not been near your island, and am not going, though I should go right over if I had any desire. As I have not, don't you worry; I am on the mainland, and shall move on when I please, or stay here as long as I please. Let this be understood, and—if it suits you—let us part in peace."

Bridle-path's manner was very quiet, and his voice was not once raised above its usual pitch, but, annoyed by the undisguised attempt of the ruffian to intimidate him, he purposed having his own position clearly defined.

Roaring Bill gazed at him in silence for some time. Bill, like his comrades, was thoroughly disreputable of appearance. More soap and water, and less whisky, would have improved them. A barber and a tailor could have worked wonders, too, but only a miracle could make their faces anything but repulsive.

"We are men o' peace ourselves," asserted Bill, after a long pause. "We make it a pint ter do all we kin ter hasten the time when the lamb kin lay down inside the lion, as the Sunday-school books say; an' ter do this we must avoid quarrels. We'll move off, Mr. Bridle-path, an' we wish ye a Happy New Year. Heroes, bend yer toe-j'ints!"

The speaker ambled on. His head was lowered, but his course took him very near to the surveyor. The latter scented trouble. There had been an evil twinkle in the ruffian's eyes, and, believing some scheme was in his mind, Bridle-path watched keenly.

When they were side by side the expected trick came.

Roaring Bill reached out quickly and essayed to seize the young man's nose between his thumb and finger.

Just how it happened was not clear to Bill, but a moment later he found himself lying on his back, and had a feeling that some infernal machine had broken all the bones of his body in twain. But the island-man was tough, and he soon scrambled to his feet.

"Critter, you hit me," he cried, furiously.

"I knocked you down," Bridle-path coolly admitted.

"How dared ye? How dared ye touch the untamed rhinoceros o' the hills? By mighty! it'll prove a dear blow ter you! I'll hav revenge! I'll pepper you full of holes! I'll—"

He drew his revolver and trouble seemed unavoidable, for the surveyor faced him as calm as ever, but somebody else was to take a hand in the game.

"Hold!" cried a clear voice. "Drop that revolver, Bill Blood, or you will feel my bite!"

Roaring Bill's hand dropped mechanically, and forward toward the quartette came a single female figure. It was one of novel and striking appearance, but Bridle-path was not slow to recognize her. It was Cythia. She had changed her attire since the ball, and was clad in a neat dress of scarlet cloth. Taken in connection with her jet-black hair it made a striking picture, and he would have been bold who dared assert she was not very handsome.

Instead of the mocking smile of the ball-room, her face now had a severe frown.

"Bill Blood, do you want me to take you in hand?" she added, angrily.

The ruffian glared at her in a responsive mood, but made no reply.

"You need a lesson," she went on. "You are never content to act like a decent man, but must run after a quarrel as if it were a flask of the devil's drink you love so well."

"He knocked me down!" growled Bill.

"Why?"

"Dunno! He had no cause."

"You lie as fluently as ever. I saw all; I beard all. You acted the ruffian, as usual; you tried to act the bully, but me to grief. The fault is wholly yours, sir. This gentleman spoke and acted as any man of spirit would when menaced by an enemy, and you deserved all you got."

"You're mighty hard on a feller who's allus been yer best frien' an' champion. He struck me like a mule's heel—"

"And you deserved it."

"Conveying to Mr. Blood assurances of my

most distinguished consideration," added Bridle-path, "I think he overestimates the force of my blow. If he was shaken, it was by the fall; I prostrated him with a light stroke on the chest, at the same time catching his heel with my toe. You will recover without a physician, Mr. Blood."

"See! he jeers at me now!" howled the fellow. "Cythia, it ain't no use o' talkin'; I've had an affront that can't be wiped out any way but with blood, an' he must furnish it!"

The speaker threw up his rifle, but Cythia stepped between him and his coveted prey.

"Down with that weapon!" she cried, in a ringing voice. "Down with it, or your boon friends will miss their ally. If there is a victim here, it will be you, Bill Blood!"

CHAPTER X. LUCIFER ANNEX.

THE threat was not impressed upon Roaring Bill by words alone; Cythia had drawn a revolver, and it bore upon him unwaveringly. The girl was to be admired then, if not for womanly qualities. Her bravery was beyond question, though she may have known Blood too well to fear harm then.

He lowered the rifle slowly and sullenly.

"Always the way!" he growled. "You take up ag'in' yer own side, an' thar ain't no show. You're dead ag'in' the island folks, an', no doubt, wishes us all dead."

"You know that's false!" she retorted. "I never interfere with you except when you get to acting the ruffian, as on this occasion. If you were as true to the island folks as I am, there would be less to quarrel about there. It is you and your cronies, with your evil deeds, that keep our people always under the ban."

Roaring Bill did not answer, but he was not to be appeased. His sullen air remained, and, though he showed no disposition to renew the fight, held his own in the argument by a silence which spoke plainly.

Cythia turned to Bridle-path.

"You will have no more trouble, sir," she observed.

"I owe you thanks for interfering in my behalf. Perhaps"—he glanced at the men, and decided to refrain from saying, as he intended, that he could, perhaps, have cared for himself. "There is no good reason for a quarrel," he went on, pacifically. "Your friends accused me of spying upon the island. I know not what is there to invite a spy, but that's not in my line. I am a stranger in these parts, and wish to mind my own business. Let me hope that my alacrity to maintain my rights will not breed ill will."

"Certainly, it will not."

"I am glad to know this."

"You and I met last night at the ball," pursued Cythia, with an earnest air which indicated a good deal, "and I remember you as the most pleasant acquaintance of the evening. I trust our friendship is not to be cut short. This island, yonder, is not a private place, as you have been told; it is free to all who care to come there. That the people of Glory Eden don't come is true, but they despise us and our poverty. Perhaps every one is not so worldly and prejudiced."

Bridle-path did not fail to take the hint, but quietly answered:

"Possibly you are just as well off. Acquaintances are not always friends, and friends not always true."

"Graf Giblon!" exclaimed Phin Hicks.

Cythia started. Both she and Bridle-path looked up, and the reputed head of the island colony was seen approaching. He did not look less impressive than before, though the quality arose from his wonderful physique, rather than intelligence. That he was far below Cythia in that respect was certain, but in point of cleanliness, if not more, he stood prominently above Roaring Bill and the other men.

Graf came up rapidly, trying to gain a clew from the faces of those in the group.

"What's up?" he asked, abruptly.

"Nothing," Cythia replied.

"Thar's been trouble hyer; I kin see it plain. Speak out, gal! What was it?"

"Your ruffians, yonder, molested this man."

"Ruffians!" echoed Roaring Bill, with a scowl.

"What else are you?"

"Them who goes ter fancy balls gets above their kind."

"So do those who flirt with the hangman!"

"Enough o' this cheap talk!" ordered Graf, firmly. "You an' the men are always quarrelin', Cythia, an' the whole lot on you will say more cheap things in a day than you ought ter in a year. Drop it! Tell me about this muss, hyer."

It was a long story. Cythia constituted herself speaker for the crowd, but her version did not please Roaring Bill. He knew his last chance was to convince Graf Giblon, and he interrupted frequently, so that he and Cythia had a spirited discussion. Bridle-path did not speak once, but stood leaning on his rifle calmly; and Graf, too, let them fight it out.

When it was over he had his own say:

"Bill Blood, your idees are all wrong. I've

Strawberry Sam.

lived a good many years, an' ain't never seen no need o' quarrelin', or havin' any trouble. Peace is better'n black eyes an' gunshot diffikilties, I say. You're wrong, William; you hadn't ought ter made no rumpus. I know you mean wal, an' it ain't in me ter say nothin' harsh, but you hadn't ought ter been sassy ter the stranger. Cythia's right! More nor this, ef the stranger wants ter see the island, Cythia's got her boat an' kin row him over. All's welcome, thar, Mr. Bridle-path."

The surveyor was somewhat surprised to see the familiarity that all these men showed with his name, but this was not what occupied his thoughts most at that time. He could not get rid of the impression that Graf Giblon had some object in all this; that he was not sincere, or, if so, that some purpose lurked back of his friendly manner.

This idea was strengthened by the fact, that Roaring Bill accepted the verdict without a word. Had Graf made him some secret sign?

"I shall be glad to take Mr. Bridle-path over," remarked Cythia. "I want him to see we are not barbarians."

"That's right. Will yer go, stranger?"

Bridle-path thought of the Graf Giblon on the previous night, taking his daughter away in warlike fashion, and contrasted him with the pacific Graf of this occasion. Did a trap lurk behind the invitation? Even Cythia might be in it.

The surveyor hesitated only for a moment. Bad as Glory Eden considered Lucifer Annex they never had been able to bring any direct charge against them, and he determined to test the island people.

"I'll go, with pleasure," he replied.

"That's right. You'll find we ain't so bad as we're painted. Boys, I want you; we'll leave Cythia ter row him over. Come on!"

He waved his hand to Bill Blood and his cronies, and they fled away at Graf's heels as obediently as well-trained soldiers. Since he had no real authority over them, this was, Bridle-path believed, sure proof of double-dealing.

He turned toward Cythia, and found her regarding him earnestly. She was not the kind of a young woman to blush, but she averted her gaze quickly, and with barely visible signs of confusion.

"Am I really invited to the island?" he asked.

"Certainly. I shall be glad to have you go, if you will."

"I cannot refuse so fair a guide."

"I hope you are not beginning with idle flattery."

"Miss Cythia, every one of your sex has consulted a mirror to learn how she looks. You ought to know as well as I that it was not flattery when I call you a fair guide. Besides, I'm not given to flattery."

"We are plain people at the island, and not accustomed to light talk. I am glad if you feel as I do. Now, if you will follow, I'll lead the way."

"Willingly."

Cythia passed along the shore several rods, and then reached a boat which was held by the painter to a pointed rock. It was in deep water, and both entered. Bridle-path would have taken the oars, but she refused to permit it, and herself began to use them. By the time she had pulled a hundred feet he was reconciled to the arrangement; she showed singular skill and grace.

Bridle-path sat in the stern and watched the island draw near. What would he see there? Whom would he meet? Was he going into a trap?

Hiding his doubts under a mask of unbroken calmness he talked easily with Cythia, and her own part was not neglected. She was amiable and friendly, and, more than that, was intelligent and ready of speech. He found more evidence of refinement than was to be expected, and wondered that she could be content to live as she did. True, the bold expression of her face, and sundry hard lines about the mouth, told that she was not all angel—even if he had not known it before.

The island was reached, and both landed.

Bridle-path saw an inviting view ahead. The trees, at that point, were not thick enough to shut out the sun, and there was a beautiful turf. He followed Cythia among the stalwart trees, and would have been dull not to see that it was the fairest spot for miles around.

Glory Eden could not begin to compete with it.

Suddenly the town burst upon his vision, and the charm was broken. There were about twenty small buildings, and one that was long and, taking all in all, large. It was a wretched scene. Some of the houses were primitive log structures; the others were tumble-down shanties. All were miserably small, and many were falling to pieces.

Dirt and dogs seemed to be the prevailing industry, for both flourished.

Cythia did not fail to see the change in Bridle-path's expression.

"You don't like our town?"

"Frankly, I don't."

"Remember we are poor."

"Nails are reasonably cheap at Glory Eden. These would do wonders here. So would a cart, a spade, and a man to take away some of the dirt and decaying substance that threaten to overwhelm the shanties. This speech may be brutally plain from a guest, but I should expect fever and all sorts of diseases if I breathed this pestilential air. It will kill you all."

"What of it?" she returned, sullenly. "The sooner we all die, the better."

"Why?"

"Ask the people of Glory Eden."

"I am asking you. Near as this place is to Glory Eden it practically is a distinct settlement, and I don't see why the comments of the larger place, favorable or adverse, need to affect you. If they see fit to scorn you, why not ignore them and go on your way calmly?"

"Did you ever know what it is to be socially ostracized?"

"I fear I never shall know. I care so little for the opinions of mankind that I should not feel the flattery of their praise or the sting of their condemnation. As for this settlement, I should say it rests with yourselves to decide where you will bring up. Nails, soap and water, and a garbage-cart, are what Lucifer Annex needs for the first step in the way of redemption. Excuse me if I am too plain in my remarks, but it's all meant for the best."

Cythia had listened attentively, and without any evidence of resentment. She sighed when he finished.

"One might as well try to move the rocks of Mozambique Point as to make our men ambitious. They despise work, dig just enough gold to live, and allow all things here to go as you see them. But let us drop that subject. Come to the Giblon house."

Bridle-path did not refuse the invitation, and they went forward. Several slovenly women and two or three evil-looking men were visible, and they became objects of undisguised curiosity. They entered the Giblon house, where a surprise awaited the surveyor. Outside, the house did not differ greatly from the others; within, it was as neat as any residence he ever had seen. It was fairly well furnished, and, at various points, little vanities in the way of ornament told of a woman's efforts to make something out of nothing.

All this spoke of Cythia, and Bridle-path felt a thrill of remorse. He had talked severely about the want of cleanliness outside; he now had proof that he had addressed the one of all the villagers who was not responsible. Clearly, she had no love for lack of system.

She invited him to sit down, and he obeyed. Then she proceeded to act the hostess.

Many a man would have been pleased to have Cythia entertain him. With her scarlet dress, black hair and handsome face she was brilliant, and the heightened color in her face, and the sparkle in her eyes, did not lessen what was attractive in her appearance.

Her language, too, was correct. It was usually proof against censure, though, now and then, the wildness in her nature would flash out, Bridle-path was not charmed. Cythia was superior both to her associates and her surroundings, but he was observing enough to see that there was more of fire, bitterness and unscrupulousness than conscientiousness in her nature.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER MAN WANTS SOMETHING.

THE interview lasted over half an hour, and Cythia plainly exerted herself to be agreeable, and to present the island dwellers in a light less offensive. Bridle-path wondered at this. He, if similarly placed, would have passed as lightly over the other residents.

The girl spoke of her visit to the ball-room, and then her feelings were shown without restraint. She had always been scorned and despised by the men and women of Glory Eden, and, seeing her chance to strike back, she had done so. She fully realized how their feelings had been lacerated, and exulted in the fact; her eyes blazed with triumph and gratified malice as she spoke of that event.

Bridle-path did not care to make his stay too long, and departed as soon as he could do so courteously, but Cythia went with him, and took him through the timber by a new route.

His opinion of the beauty of the place was increased; he rarely had seen a fairer place than the island where it was left to itself. The trees were lofty and shapely, and not thick enough to present a handsome growth of grass, except where there was an occasional thicket; and the water of the lake rolled calmly on either side.

Cythia again led the visitor across.

They parted on the northern shore.

"I am greatly obliged for your hospitality, and for this view of a fair kingdom of the sea," he observed.

"Do you like it, really?"

"Who could help it?"

"A" of Glory Eden."

"They judge by their prejudices, and it is doubtful if one out of twenty, there, ever was on the island. That counts for nothing however; the island is there to answer for itself, and is a most interesting place."

"Would you care ever to see it again?" was the direct question.

"I'm not sure I would be allowed there."

"I ask you, now."

Cythia's gaze was full on his face. He was strong enough to hide all feeling in that way, and rather than embarrass both himself and the girl, he returned:

"I shall not fail to come."

"Perhaps," continued Cythia, showing undisguised pleasure, "you do not think very highly of me after last night's affair at the ball, but I had many an old score to pay off. No one at Glory Eden would associate with me, and when I went there I heard many a scornful speech, all spoken openly. No one spared my feelings. I determined to shock them, and did it."

She burst into a laugh, loud and ringing, and Bridle-path smiled sympathy. Whatever Cythia was, he was not sorry she had given the Edenites, such a start.

He conversed with her awhile longer, and then took leave and walked toward the upper hills. Looking back from an elevated point he saw the girl rowing toward the island, her scarlet attire looking particularly striking. His expression grew thoughtful, and not a little troubled.

"I am sorry for her. There is good in the young woman, but the thorns grow thick amid the grain. She is wild; I fear she is wicked. The gleam of her eyes is positively startling, at times. Once, she might have been made a fine woman. Now—is it too late?"

He hesitated for a moment, and then added:

"Anyhow, I don't want the job of remodeling her."

He resumed his way, but had gone only a few rods when he heard the sound of voices. Some impulse caused him to proceed carefully, and he soon discovered his old acquaintances, Roaring Bill and his two boon companions, stretched on the ground, and smoking pipes of disreputable appearance. Graf Giblon was not present, and Roaring Bill was freeing his mind fully.

"Things is goin' ter the dogs," growled Mr. Blood, "an' I opine it's erbout time fer yer Uncle William ter pack his trunk fer other climes. The island is gettin' too good fer any use."

"Le's kick up a row," suggested Phin Hicks, feebly.

"An' hev Graf Giblon stomp on ye."

"Graf didn't used ter be that way."

"That's it, exactly. He didn't use ter be so. He's changed, an' so's Cythia. By mighty! when she used ter go ter Glory Eden an' kick up a row, I wuz proud on her! I loved that gal the day I heered how she hosswhipped the editor feller. But Cythia has growed ter be a dove, an' we've lost our eagle."

"Didn't she kick up a row at the ball?"

"That don't count; she took Pretty Boy over ter the island. Did she ever take anybody else over there? I reckon not. She's mashed on Pretty Boy, an' Graf is jest as bad."

"I don't think it," declared Center-shot Steve. "Graf says he has a scheme ter help all of us on the island, at the expense o' Glory Eden, an' you never knowed him ter deceive his own gang. He says he'd hev put a bullet through the young feller afore allowin' Cythia ter take him in her boat, only she was ignorantly workin' right ter the end he desired."

"Graf said all that, I allow, but I'm tired o' waitin'. Years ago I said ter Graf, an' I've said it sence, too—'Thar's heaps o' plunder at Glory Eden. Thar's a bank; thar's business houses; thar's fine dwellin's an' rich men. Thar's plunder thar enough ter make all o' the island people well fixed. Why not tackle Glory Eden, some night, an' scoop the whole booty?' That's wot I've said, but Graf hez always been on the contrary side."

"He's got a plan, now."

"Wal, he didn't let us know it."

"Not a word."

"I'll believe when I see it."

"You're a growler, Bill."

"I be, you bet! I'm a hustler, too, an' not in love with tame life at the island when we kin cut out plunder."

The conversation continued, but Bridle-path heard nothing more of value. Roaring Bill proved his right to be called a "growler," and there the matter rested.

They finally rose and moved toward the lake, leaving Bridle-path alone.

He had not found their words of indifferent interest. On the contrary, he regarded what he had heard as highly important. Possibly the men of Lucifer Annex had been talking in just this way for years, but he doubted it. Complainers they might always have been, and ostracized they certainly were, but he believed that a current had been set in motion, lately, which threatened danger to Glory Eden.

The men of the Annex were far in the minority, but a night attack on the town might result in its being plundered and burned to the ground.

"I must tell the mayor of this," thought the surveyor, and he kept his word later in the day.

He wandered around for an hour longer, and then started for the town. He had nearly reached it when he encountered a person he had

not seen since he stood by the desk in the hotel, talking to Red Ring, two hours before the ball.

This person was the olive-faced stripling to whom Red Ring had appealed on one occasion, and whom he called Manfred. Bridle-path had not made the acquaintance of the youth, but the latter now nodded familiarly.

"Out for a walk?" he inquired, carelessly.

"Yes."

"Fine hills, these."

"They are not to be beaten."

"I often wander there, but not with a heavy gun like yours. These are good enough for me."

The speaker touched the revolvers in his belt.

"What would you do against a grizzly?"

"No grizzly ever got the best of me yet. Ditto, men!"

"Possibly your youth might save you from the men."

"I ask no favors on that account, or any other. I am young; it would be useless to deny the fact; but, while not a seeker after strife or contention, I am amply able to care for Number One. That's all!"

The boy spoke with a mixture of cool confidence and careless indifference, and Bridle-path was led to regard him more closely than before.

Manfred was slender and graceful, and neatly clad. He had dark hair and eyes, and a smooth, handsome face. It was of an olive hue, so-called, but not strikingly so. His dress was the most gorgeous and foppish of Mexican costumes. He might have been mistaken for a Mexican by some, and often was thus referred to, but Bridle-path thought he detected other blood. If Manfred had stated that he had long lived in the West Indies, the surveyor would not have doubted him.

"Well," inquired the youth, breaking the silence, "how do you like my looks?"

"You have no reason to complain of Nature, thus far, but you need more muscle."

"I am not a bull-fighter."

"I would not be so impolite as to ask your occupation, but I'll dodge the point, and, if you choose to talk, will listen attentively."

"You say it well, and as ingeniously as could be expected. Since I came to Glory Eden I have not shouted my business from the house-tops, but something impels me to confide in you. I am here to look for a man named Richard M. Knox!"

Cool as Bridle-path was, he betrayed surprise. He had listened unmoved to like statements before, but was not proof against everything. Was the whole world looking for Richard Knox?

This time no keen scrutiny was fixed upon the surveyor; Manfred was looking away over the valley in a thoughtful, absent way.

Bridle-path rallied.

"Can't you find him?"

"I haven't, thus far."

"Have you reason to believe he is here?"

"That's what I don't know. I've been told so, but have not an overwhelming amount of faith in the assertion. Not having anything else to do, I am lying around here, awaiting the outcome."

"Does no one know of this man?"

"I haven't inquired."

"Indeed!"

"My instructions were to keep strictly to myself all that I knew and wanted to know, and I have followed the plan out thus far, though I have been in a dickens of a passion over it. Now, I am bound to have one confidant, and have selected you from among all others—chiefly because I think you can hold your tongue. Will you help me to find Richard M. Knox?"

CHAPTER XII.

A QUESTION QUICKLY ANSWERED.

MANFRED brought his wandering gaze back from a trip over the valley, and looked at Bridle-path without any of the indifference he had been showing. The surveyor came to the point at once.

"Who and what is Richard M. Knox?" he demanded.

"You shall hear. There is no mystery to the matter, except in a minor way, and that shall not stand in the path of a full statement of what I know."

"Upwards of twenty years ago there lived in a certain town well east of here a man named as above, Richard M. Knox. I know but little about him, except that he had a brother Nicholas Knox, and that Nicholas had a son Richard. Where the last two resided I never learned, nor do I know if they are now living. If they are, Nicholas must be nearly sixty, and his son Richard but little less than thirty."

"It is with Richard M., brother of Nicholas, that my story deals. He was my father!"

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Bridle-path.

"Yes. But you seem surprised."

"I took you to be a Cuban," the surveyor craftily answered.

"You shall hear. I was a twin, a daughter being born on the same night. Friend, I came into a cold world. I know not how it was, but am told that Richard M. Knox hated me with all the rancor of his nature, and he was as fierce as a pirate when he felt like it. Why he had such a spite against me may never be known, but hate me he did from the first. He soon

put me out of his sight. I was sent to Cuba in charge of a woman of mixed blood, and reared there. Old Hesper, the woman mentioned, was my sole guardian.

"I grew up believing myself an orphan. Hesper died a year ago, and told me the foregoing facts. She could not, or would not give me any further particulars, but she was very circumstantial as far as she went. My father had hated me; wished to get rid of me! had paid her a moderate sum to take me to Cuba and rear me as I really was reared.

"Hesper advised me to go to my father and claim my rights, whatever they might be. She also left me a few hundred dollars she had saved by careful economy.

"I took her advice and went to my old home. There I learned what I have told you about the Knox family, but did not find my father. As near as dates could be estimated, he left town immediately after I was sent away, accompanied by his wife and infant daughter, my sister.

"Of course my inquiries brought up old recollections, and the slow-going town'speople talked a good deal about the case, which had caused so much wonder, then. Now, either there was one person there who knew more than the others told me, or the news traveled, or—something else. Anyhow, I received a letter which I will now read you."

The Cuban drew a folded paper from his pocket and read as follows:

"MANFRED KNOX:—If you wish to find your father, go at once to Glory Eden, Colorado. It was there that he settled when he became a miner. Go there, if you want to find him. I would, however, impress upon your mind the need of caution. Do not go there and spread your story broadcast, or you may regret it. Instead, keep your business to yourself, and, unless you find Richard M. Knox at once, do not even inquire for him. Lie low, and an unknown friend will soon make all clear to you. Await the revelation of that friend, for in such helps lies your only hope. I repeat it:—you will ruin all if you tell too much there."

"ONE WHO WILL MEET YOU."

The Cuban looked up to meet Bridle-path's gaze.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

"That depends. Has the unknown shown up?"

"No."

"Or been heard from?"

"No."

"Can it be you are the victim of a hoax?"

"I should be dull not to suspect it, but I wish to think otherwise. Is it a scurvy joke, or not? That's the conundrum I've been wrestling with until my patience is exhausted. There is no Richard M. Knox here unless he is sailing under false colors. Did you ever hear the name?"

"It seems a trifle familiar," Bridle-path answered, quietly, "but I may have heard it elsewhere. I am not good at names, I fear. I have not met any such man in Glory Eden."

"He seems to have vanished entirely. I have, in a quiet way, fished for information as to past and present residents, but have never heard of any Knox. I suppose the chances are all in favor of the idea that some idiot played a practical joke on me, and sent me here on a fool's errand, but, somehow, I can't fully believe that."

"Provided the information was sincere, who would be likely to be back of it?"

"I haven't the ghost of a theory."

"Had you no relatives?"

"I know only of the uncle named Nicholas, and his son, the younger Richard Knox."

"Were they friendly to your father?"

"I don't know. Their history and residence were alike unknown to those who told me of them. Can't you advise me, sir?"

Bridle-path engaged in meditation before answering.

"I see no way but to wait for your unknown correspondent to reveal himself," he finally returned.

"I think it was a woman."

"Oh!"

"The writing indicated it, though I am not sure. Now, you see how I am situated. Look at me! People estimate my age below what it really is, yet I am twenty years old. I am slender, and, though strong in a certain way, am not fit to use a pick. My finances are growing short, and I will not accept charity. The question is, shall I give up rainbow-chasing and go where I can make my living? What do you advise?"

Manfred spoke earnestly, and evidently asked the question in all sincerity. Bridle-path regarded him attentively before answering, but finally responded:

"You have come here and waited long for your unknown correspondent to make good her promise and give you light. I do not see that you have any cause to expect the revelation at such a late day. Nobody but a trifler would so long postpone it, I should say."

"Just my view. I'm afraid I have been humbugged. I think I'll leave town. I wish I never had come."

The Cuban spoke in a tone of disgust, this time, and then proceeded to light a cigarette, to soothe his nerves—at least, such was his purpose, though any sensible person would fail to see what hope lay in that parody of the cigar.

He talked for some time longer, and felt satisfaction in having divulged his long-kept secret. The surveyor heard all patiently, and talked amicably, but gave no confidence in return. Why he had come to Glory Eden he did not state.

Finally, Manfred suggested that they return to the hotel together, which was done. Bridle-path went to his room at once.

"So," he murmured, half-aloud, "another person wants to find Richard Knox. This grows interesting, and it will be worth while to a disinterested observer like myself to see how it will all result."

A peculiar smile hovered on his face, and he sat down and fell into deep thought.

Unknown to him, another chapter in the drama was even then in progress. When they approached the house they had been observed by a woman who was at an upper window, and Manfred had been scarcely left alone when he was informed that a lady wished to see him. The Cuban had his share of gallantry, and he went without any words following the servant.

He was conducted to a room, where he found a lady he had seen previously, that day. It was Mrs. Daisy Westcott.

She bowed graciously and motioned him to be seated.

"You are surprised to be thus summoned?" she inquired.

She was not young enough to keep up his gallantry, and he frankly answered:

"Yes."

"You can not guess why I sent for you?"

"No."

"It is to ask you if you are tired of waiting for the reward you were to get for coming to Glory Eden?"

Manfred's dark eyes flashed with sudden light.

"I am not sure I understand," he replied.

"You received a note which led you to come here."

"Did I? How do you know?"

"I am pleased to see you so cautious. It is proof that you have not neglected my advice—that you keep silent—mine, for it was I who wrote the note, telling you to seek Richard Knox here!"

Manfred drew a deep breath; he doubted no longer.

"You have not been in any great haste to keep your part of the compact," he observed.

"The complaint is natural, but not deserved. I intended to be here as soon as you, but have been ill ever since I gave you directions. I ought to have written, but did not. Now, we are both here."

"And where is—you know who."

"Richard Knox. I know. But first, hear me. Do you know why I am interested in you?"

"I do not."

"I was one of your mother's most intimate friends."

"Then you are not a relative?"

"No."

If Charles G. Curtis had been there he might have detected a discrepancy in Mrs. Westcott's accounts, but a discerning person would not have wondered at anything from Daisy.

"Perhaps you can tell me the object of all your mysterious movements?" suggested Manfred.

"It was to reunite you to your kindred, but I fear we have come too late. As soon as I was able to bear travel, after my illness, I came on here. I arrived penniless, but hoped to replenish my funds by appealing to your father. I came too late—too late by almost twenty years. Richard Knox is dead!"

The Cuban's face grew suddenly grave. His disappointment was as keen as if he had been moved by better motives.

"Dead!" he echoed, blankly.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE OLD BLACK BEAR.

"THAT is the situation," Mrs. Westcott replied. "You seem shocked, and it is not to be wondered at. Of course it is not filial grief, for that you cannot feel for a father you never saw after you were an infant, and who sent you away as he did."

"My grief is for the dollars I never can hope to get," Manfred answered, frankly.

"Certainly, and you and I are alike left stranded. I claim to be above a mere black-mailer, but I did think that, as we were both in hard luck, it would be no more than fair to ask your unfeeling father to pay us a little something to keep his secret."

"You say he is dead. How do you know?"

"Because I have seen his grave. For many years he was as thoroughly lost to me as to you, but, shortly before you came back from Cuba, I

learned that he was here under a false name. One who knew him well saw him here, a few months after he disappeared from the old home. I chanced upon this person, and learned the facts. Then I decided to come here. I came, but only to learn he had been dead a long time; he must have died soon after my acquaintance saw him here."

"And his wife?"

"Also dead."

"We seem at the end of the rope. But what name did he bear here?"

"Richard Mayo. I remember, now, his wife once told me that Mayo was his middle name. When here he was partner of Charles G. Curtis in the old Black Bear Mine, a profitless venture which left the owners in debt. Mayo fell down a shaft and was killed, and his wife died soon after."

"And their child—my twin sister?"

"Said to have died, too."

"You put stress on the word 'said.' Why?"

"Curtis is the only man in town who was here then, and others here have only a vague knowledge of those old days. Some never heard of a child; others say it died. Mr. Curtis confirms the last report, and a truly good man never lies."

"You have an idea. What is it?"

Mrs. Westcott leaned forward and looked straight into Manfred's eyes.

"There is a young lady, aged about twenty, at Charles G. Curtis's, whom he claims as his daughter, but she looks so much like Richard Mayo Knox's wife that the resemblance startled me."

"Can it be you think her my sister?" the Cuban asked, with fresh interest.

"I leave you to form your own conclusions. She is about your age, and resemblances like that do not often occur."

"If she is, what then?"

"I don't know. Evidently, Curtis has never let her know her parentage, and the most reasonable theory is that his motive was purely one of benevolence if he took her in as an orphan and reared her as his own daughter."

"Unless he adopted one-half of a gold-mine at the same time," added Manfred.

"I do not think he did. The Black Bear Mine is said to have been a monumental failure."

"Do you suppose Curtis wants to adopt a son, also?"

"Plainly, what do you mean to do?"

"Anything but work," Manfred confessed. "I don't see any reason why the old man should take us in tow. The girl may be his daughter or Mayo's, but even if we could prove what you suspect, how would it help us? If we meditated blackmail, a man who had done a charitable act would not be a subject for our endeavors. Nor do I imagine Curtis would take me in on the plea that I could not endure to be longer away from my sister. I can't answer for you, but my ship seems to be aground."

The Cuban tossed his black hair back from his forehead, and leaned back in his chair with an air of resignation which did not conceal the fact that he was seriously discomposed. Mrs. Westcott studied his face critically.

"You look like a bold young man."

"I am—at times!"

"If you don't want to work, what are you to do?"

"Not gamble, for I always lose. Not rob stages, for it wouldn't work here. I can't betray my trust and decamp with the funds of a firm, for nobody has yet trusted me. I don't see my way clear. The man who is born lazy is to be pitied."

"You were not born brainless, nor was I. If I can see a way to make a raise, will you help me?"

"I make no promises in advance, but I am not going to be too delicate. When a fellow's pocket is empty he gets to be more man and less philosopher than when the good yellow coins weigh him down. Make up your scheme as soon as you please. By the way, don't turn the search-light away from Curtis. If there is a weak spot in his armor we want to know it."

The conversation was prolonged for some time, and Manfred asked more particularly about the way Richard Mayo had died. He had heard the story before, but without interest. Now, all was different. The Black Bear Mine became an object worth thinking about.

When he had heard all that was known to his companion he took his leave, but did not go to his room.

Leaving the hotel he once more climbed the ridge. His course took him near the Banquo Mine, and he looked with some interest at the scene of activity.

Diverging to the right he kept on, and reached the Black Bear. The dark entrance led him to find a pine-knot, which he lighted, and then entered.

The somber walls were impressive, but he was not troubled with melancholy feeling. Mayo had died there, but the observer was very much alive; the older man had shown poor taste in leaving the world, at all. That was Manfred's strongest idea.

When he had looked to his satisfaction he proceeded to survey the shafts, and ended by de-

scending the ladder in one of them. The old Black Bear had not been worked long enough to reach far down toward the center of the earth, and the bottom was soon reached. There he saw passages leading away in various directions, and followed along them with the torch uplifted. Since coming to Glory Eden he had been in modern mines, but never before had he felt the interest of the present occasion.

"These rocks have been pressed by the feet of my father," he murmured. "Yonder gash was, perhaps, made by the pick in his hand. Here he toiled, perspired, planned, hoped, despaired, and died! It would almost seem as if his ghost must haunt the place, coming back as came Banquo's to the feast—"

He paused suddenly, grew even more serious, and then slowly added:

"Curtis named his new mine the Banquo. Why?"

If he had wondered before he wondered more now, but light did not come to him. Vague suspicions which he had entertained before became more prominent, but not clearer.

He examined the passages thoroughly, and his serious mood continued. He had no love for his dead father, but the deserted mine, like a tomb, had its influence, and beset with poverty as he was, he could not help considering how very different it would have been if he had been kept along with the family and the mine had been a success.

"Instead, I am a beggar, while my sister, if that's what Curtis's reputed daughter is, dwells surrounded with luxuries and grandeur!"

This thought brought him all the bitterness of a nature not committed to plain honesty, and he became more than ever determined to join Mrs. Daisy Westcott in any step that would be to their mutual interest financially.

Tiring of the subterranean passages, at last, he went again to the ladder and began the ascent. Holding the torch in one hand he went up without thought of anything except the rungs and safe footing, until near the top. Then he looked up and almost fell off the ladder in the nervous start that followed.

Revealed by the light of the torch a human face confronted him, and a pair of wild eyes seemed to glare at him in a frenzied way.

It was a startling sight. What demon of the darkness had he found? Was it really something human, or an object quite the reverse? There was a painful pause, and then Manfred's mind cleared and his fears abated.

"Strawberry Sam!" he exclaimed.

He had identified the wild-eyed man correctly, but the miner was not so quick to recognize him. The fixed glare continued.

"Say, what are you doing here?" Manfred added.

"Are you alive?" Sam inquired, doubtfully.

"I reckon I am. Don't you know me? Tone down your wild stare, for it cuts like a dagger. What are you glowering at, man?"

The miner drew a long breath.

"I thought it was him!"

"Who is 'him'?"

"Come up, an' I'll tell ye."

The miner rose to his feet, and his contemporaneous return to calmness of manner somewhat dispelled Manfred's fears of attack. He ascended the ladder, but took position several feet from the birthmarked man, and next to the exit. Thus situated, he could beat retreat at any moment. But Strawberry Sam no longer looked dangerous.

"I seen yer light," he explained, "an' I thought it was him, or his ghost. I lay down an' watched, an' the light came nigher, an' you begun ter climb the ladder. My breath stopped, an' my heart was in my throat. Was it him comin' up?—was it him, or his ghost? No wonder I glowered. I found it hard ter recognize yer, fer I had hoped ter hev my hands at his neck."

"All this is Greek to me. I hope you haven't gone crazy, Sam?"

"Crazy? Do you think I would do that afore my work was done?"

"What is your work?"

The miner's eyes gleamed again, and his lips parted wolfishly.

"My work is ter find Richard Knox!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE INSCRIPTION ON THE WALL.

MANFRED started.

"You want to find Richard Knox?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

Strawberry Sam touched the mark on his arm.

"I have just found the name o' the man I've been huntin' fer. That's him."

"But Richard Knox has been dead twenty years."

"Nonsense! He ain't over twenty-eight years old, an' was alive two year ago."

It began to dawn upon the Cuban that Sam could not be talking about the Richard M. Knox known to him, and he grew cautious.

"Do you really refer to the man you have so long been talking about?"

"I do; I know his name, at last. When I show the red brand, after this, I needn't say I

don't know the name o' the man I'm huntin' fer."

"But why did you think he was here?"

"Read that."

The miner thrust out a small piece of white paper. There was writing on it, and Manfred read as follows:

"STRAWBERRY SAM:—If you want news of the man you have hunted for so many months, go to the old Black Bear Mine. Wait, wait! All things come to him who waits, and if you are patient and look sharp enough, you will get tidings of the man you hate so much. Try it, and if you don't get the full revelation on your first call, you shall soon have another, and more explicit, note from me.

"DIOGENES."

"What do yer think o' that?" Sam demanded, when Manfred looked up.

"What do you think?"

"That my day is nigh at hand. The fortuneteller knew her business when she said I'd find my man in Glory Eden. I've waited long, but the time is comin'. Yes; it's nigh at hand, an' I'll hev my revenge!"

He snapped his strong teeth like a dog, and Manfred was glad he was next to the exit.

"What proof have you that this note-writer is sincere?"

"Why should he be t'otherways?"

"If sincere, why did he send you here? Your man is not present. I've hunted the place over, myself. In my opinion, some smart fool has played a joke on you."

"No; it's all comin' around ez the fortuneteller said."

Manfred was old enough to realize the folly of trying to change the blind faith of an ignorant person. He said no more in that direction, but inquired:

"What are you going to do now?"

"I dunno. Ef he ain't hyer, he ain't; but I bate ter give it up. Han' me yer torch, boy, while I s'arch about, a bit."

Manfred obeyed, and Sam held the light up so that it fell on the black rocks. Previously, he had not seen them, except vaguely, and the Cuban had made no close survey, but Sam was in a mood to see all there was to be seen. He passed along, gazing curiously, but had taken only a few steps when he came to a halt, stood like a statue for a moment, and then suddenly extended his left arm with the index finger pointing to the wall.

"See!" he gurgled, rather than exclaimed.

And Manfred, looking, saw on the wall that which impressed him almost as forcibly as the miner.

On the black field was a series of white dots, forming an oblong frame, and in the frame were letters and words of the same color, the whole forming this unique inscription:

: RICHARD KNOX DIED HERE! :

There was a long pause, and then Strawberry Sam broke out hoarsely:

"Look, look! The spirits hev done this, an' it's proof that they're on my side. I shall win; by mighty! I shall win!"

Himself aroused from the spell cast upon him, Manfred look about sharply. Not being a believer in spirits, he realized that human hands had made the inscription. Was it all a joke on the miner, or was there more back of it than appeared on the surface?

"The spirits are with me!" repeated Sam, exultantly.

Manfred walked to the wall, touched one of the letters, and took his hand away with a big white smear on his fingers.

"The ghosts use wet paint!" he remarked, dryly.

Sam did not comprehend the meaning of the remark, and the Cuban added:

"I think you are the victim of a hoax. The same man who sent you here by means of the note was the artist who painted this dramatic message on the wall. Look for yourself, and you will see that human hands did it; the paint is not yet dry. It is for you to decide what the message means, but don't rely on ghosts. I've proved an *alibi* for them."

It took the miner some time to see all that Manfred had detected so quickly, and when he did, he was left in a state of great uncertainty. He did not want to believe he had been deceived, but the message was not promising. Manfred did not tell him that, if the inscription had been put there as a record of fact, it referred to a Richard Knox who had died when the Richard wanted by Sam was a mere child, and the miner saw only one person in connection with it.

"I don't b'lieve a word on't," he finally declared. "He ain't dead; he didn't die hyer nor nowhar else; an' it's all a scheme ter fool me. He wrote it hisself too, Knox did; he's in Glory Eden, an' he thinks ter fool me by puttin' up sech notices as that. But he can't. I'm on the track, an' I'll hunt him down!"

The speaker had grown deeply in earnest; his utterance was loud and violent, and he flourished his marked left arm to punctuate and emphasize his remarks.

Manfred did not see fit to argue against this resolution, but only his promise to Mrs. West-

cott kept him from remarking upon the coincidence of names. He had been told that Mayo, one time partner in the Black Bear, was, really, named Richard Knox. Now, the miner announced that the object of his vendetta was thus named.

If there was no mistake, this coincidence was singular and striking.

Strawberry Sam was a good deal worked up over the latest events, and insisted upon searching the old mine, so Manfred went over the ground again, with the miner for a companion. They found no one, and returned to the entrance.

"I s'pose I'll hev ter give up an' go away," Sam observed, reluctantly.

"How could you leave your work to come?"

"I'm done. I sha'n't use the pick no more till I hev found my man. The time is nigh at hand, an' I hev only ter wait a bit. I'm sure ter win!"

He gazed at the birthmark, with a strange expression, and the Cuban shook his head gravely.

"Mad as a March hare!" he thought.

They passed out of the mine, and the place seemed deserted, but it was a fictitious showing. A human head appeared at the top of a shaft; a body followed; and a man went cautiously to the entrance. When he saw the late visitors descending the slope he indulged in an audible laugh.

"Score one for me!" he exclaimed.

This claimant to victory was Wesley Charles Eastman, and he seemed to enjoy the situation greatly.

"Come back and hunt again, if you wish," he added. "If I can't dodge you in the passages I am only a poor scout, though I did not reckon the black-haired youth in when I brought Samuel here. Confound him! my vail-of-mystery business would have worked much better on the old man if the youngster's horse-sense had been out of the way. Bah! I could have swallowed myself with chagrin when I saw him dab his hand in the white paint and give my game away. But I have impressed Samuel, just the same, and will follow it up with a more striking demonstration."

He looked down on the dwellings of Glory Eden, and thoughtfully added:

"Yes, and I'll find some way to keep Bridle-path away from Estella Curtis. He made her acquaintance, first, and when they met in the street this morning she smiled sweetly upon him, but I have marked her as mine. Sam is not likely to find his real victim, but once let him believe Bridle-path is that person, and the grim-faced man from the grizzly ranges will be an object of pity!"

Smiling contentedly, Eastman left the mine and followed the other men down the slope.

He went to Glory Eden at once, and to the hotel. There he became auditor to a conversation which proved of interest. Two men, one evidently a stranger, in the town, were the speakers.

"No other ten men have done so much for Glory Eden as Charles G. Curtis," explained the citizen. "When the place began to get on its feet those of us who had children began to think of a school, but poor men were thick as fleas and rich ones scarce. It was our worthy neighbor who helped us out. He founded the Curtis Free School, and, from that day to this, has paid every dollar of expense out of his own funds."

"A good citizen to have."

"You bet! Of course we could handsomely support a public school, now, but there is the Free School, open to all. The original small building has been replaced with one large and handsome, and we have cause to be proud of it."

"And now you're to lose your superintendent!"

"Yes; he goes in the morning. A worthy man, but now so old he is going back East. We must have a new man. Of course the selection rests wholly with Curtis, for no one else has a dollar in the school; and I dare say he will get a good man. We hope so, for we are very particular."

"You say Curtis's daughter teaches in the school?"

"Yes."

"She must have an interest in it, too."

"I should say so; it is a passion with her. You see, she was a very bright girl, learned quickly, and was proficient when young. For four years she has been a teacher, and her soul is bound up in the work."

"That's odd for one so young."

"She is like her father. Benevolence comes as natural as breathing to her, you see. She and the old superintendent worked together harmoniously, and the children of the most ignorant people here are growing up intelligent, and in a way that promises a crop of good citizens."

Conversation drifted into another channel, and Wesley Charles Eastman was not interested further. He soon went to his private room. Sitting down, he took from his pocket a note-book, and from the book a clipping from a newspaper which he proceeded to read. It was in these words:

"A convict was released from Sing Sing on the 12th, who has been serving time for forgery under the name of Charles Wesley. His real name is not

known, and nothing of his history was developed at the trial. His unlawful work with the pen was the boldest of forgeries, but the judge was so impressed with him that he was sentenced for only two years. This term, minus the usual allowance for good behavior, and he was an exemplary prisoner—has expired, and he has gone forth a free man."

Eastman broke into a hearty laugh.

"I could hardly produce it as a reference, but why shouldn't an exemplary convict make a ditto superintendent? I'll see Curtis next sun-up, and then take charge of the Free School!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE EX-CONVICT MAKES HIMSELF FELT.

The following day Charles G. Curtis sat in his private office when a caller entered. He looked up and saw Wesley Charles Eastman, and his face clouded. He had no reason to be pleased at sight of that person. Eastman, however, nodded with his usual careless confidence.

"Deep in business, aren't you?" he questioned.

"Yes, sir."

"I won't detain you long. I wouldn't interrupt at all, but I am here on business, too."

"I warn you," returned the mine-owner, hastily, "that I can give you no more money!"

"Bless me! you must think me a spendthrift. That I am not; I know as well as any man how to make a dollar pan out one hundred precious cents, and am naturally of a frugal turn of mind, with a penchant for a modest little showing in a savings-bank, and so forth. Now, I have a plan by which I can earn my own living, and not be subjected to the *d-e-e-p* mortification of calling on you for money."

The pronunciation of the word "deep," and the twinkle in the knave's eyes should have warned Curtis, but that simple-minded man breathed a sigh of relief and replied:

"I am glad to hear it, sir."

"Yes. I understand that the position of superintendent in the Curtis Free School is vacant, and am here to apply for it, myself!"

Curtis became the picture of dumfounded amazement and dismay. Eastman waited patiently, and the older man finally returned:

"I am not sure I understood you, sir."

"If you want a new super, look at me."

"You, superintendent?"

"That's the size of it."

"Great heavens! I could not consider such a thing."

"Don't stop to consider. Make the appointment, and let it go at that."

"But I have decided to appoint the Rev. Epaphrus Tukesbury, a retired clergyman—"

"Let Epaphrus wait. When I am done with the job he can have his turn. See?"

"But the position is one which demands the most unquestionable honor—"

"That's another reason why I should have it. I can't recommend Epaphrus, for his merits are unknown to me, but you will find me a jewel. As for education, I shall not get left in the scramble. I am a college man, and know Alpha from Z. Don't fear on that score; I can teach the young idea of Glory Eden how to shoot, and to hit the bull's-eye at every crack, too. Seriously, Charles, I am in dead earnest about this matter, and anxious to earn a living on the square. If I don't keep straight I give you leave to bounce me. I'll introduce modern systems in the school, or stick to fossilized dead-lights, as you prefer; I'll act wisely, gravely, satisfactorily; but this much you can mark down as a fact: when you look at me you see your next superintendent!"

Wesley Charles finished, leaned back in his chair and let his words work.

Curtis, however could only gaze at him with the old, blank dismay. The idea of giving this man charge of the school horrified him, though in point of fact, he knew no more against the visitor than that he had acted the blackmailer.

"Sir," he finally exclaimed, "I can't do this! It is wholly impossible."

"I dislike to be brutal, but I will have the place or tell all Glory Eden how Richard Mayo died. That's the story in a nutshell."

"But I paid you—"

"True, but this is a different bargain. Let us avoid reference to the dead in the abandoned mine, and come right down to this case. I mean all I say. Can I have the post as super? Or shall I tell the Mayo story? It would pain Estella to hear that old narrative."

Curtis knew it, and knew, too, that it would pain her to have Eastman as an associate in the school. No one in Glory Eden thus far knew anything against him, perhaps, but he was a fast young man, and likely to make his name notorious in a short time. It seemed criminal to make such a man Estella's daily companion, and the companion, too, of children of both sexes and all ages.

No wonder the honest, well-meaning old man was dismayed.

Eastman did not hurry him, but, keeping the easy position in his chair, waited for the shock to subside. When it did Curtis made a strong plea which was only a repetition of what had been said at the Black Bear, except that he struggled harder than before to avert trouble. Eastman heard him quietly, but not for a mo-

ment did his resolution waver; it was like beating against a rock.

Wearied at last by his exertions, Curtis began to bow to his fate; conversation came down to a business basis. Eastman told in plain words what his education was, and proved that, in that respect, he was fully capable of filling the position.

This removed one fear, and Curtis besought him to do his duty when once in the school.

Eastman promised, but the very fact of his readiness weighed against him with the listener. What was the promise of a blackmailer worth? It had to be accepted, however, and it was settled that Wesley Charles should have charge of the Free School.

It was a bitter moment for the philanthropist when he escorted Eastman to the scene of duty. He had not mentioned the Rev. Epaphrus Tukesbury to any one, and no one could be surprised at that gentleman's failure to secure a call, but it was clear the coming of the stranger would demand much explanation and involve his sponsor in manifold difficulties.

Estella was the first to be surprised, for the reason that to her was the revelation first made, but Eastman's manner was beyond criticism.

The audacious adventurer soon expressed a desire to address the school, and as Mr. Curtis could not very well object, the new superintendent was speedily on his feet.

Curtis was a man no longer young, but he never had heard a better address. Eastman's manner was at once pleasant, dignified, engaging and firm, and words fell from his lips without effort. He did not overdo the matter. The Rev. Epaphrus Tukesbury could not have given better counsel, or distilled more wisdom, and he certainly could not have found words so nimbly and gracefully.

Once, during the address, Wesley Charles took a note-book from his pocket, ostensibly to consult it for certain mathematical figures; but, really, he ran his eyes down the account of the discharge from Sing Sing of the convict known as Charles Wesley.

Inwardly, he enjoyed a quiet laugh, but his gravity was not affected outwardly.

Curtis in a measure understood the man's audacity and took no comfort from the model address, but he determined to make the position one sufficiently remunerative so that if Eastman had any good in him he would conduct himself properly for the sake of keeping the office.

That night the adventurer retired as the acknowledged new superintendent of the school, and he laughed long and often as he lay on the pillow.

"What in the world would the 'boys' say if they saw me in this new role?" he mentally inquired. "The cap don't fit my head, but the job is better than working for the State in Sing Sing. I'll behave like a good little boy, too, for it's a stepping-stone to Estella and Charles G's money. In a day or two I'll rid myself of a possible rival in Bridle-path, and then the citadel of Estella's heart must be forced to capitulate. Wesley, old stock, you never before saw so much clover in your meadow. It must be plucked!"

The following day the adventurer was at the school, and he soon made himself felt.

He was as affable as ever, and very polite to Estella, but he introduced some decided innovations in the method of teaching, always asking Miss Curtis's opinion, and never presenting a change as something which must be done.

"If you think the idea worthy of it, we will try it for a few days," was his mild way of advocating the point.

These changes were really all in line with the latest methods in the East, and, though unheard of by Estella, were so plainly wise that she was favorably impressed in spite of herself.

When school ended that day, the grave, but kind superintendent had won the hearts of the children and made great advances in Estella's respect.

If the adventurer had been as prudent elsewhere as at school he might soon have become a general favorite, but clouds quickly rose in his path. Late that evening Estella presented herself in Mr. Curtis's room.

"Father," she began, abruptly, "what references did Mr. Eastman give as to character?"

The mine-owner looked up in confusion. Only a few hours before she had spoken so favorably of Eastman that the old gentleman's hopes rose somewhat, but her manner, now, alarmed him.

"Eh? What?" he returned, feebly.

The question was repeated.

"Oh! I dare say the references were all right," he then answered, avoiding her gaze.

"Did you know the parties they were from?"

"Not personally."

"Are you sure they were genuine?"

"I saw none that appeared otherwise. But why do you ask?"

"I have lost my faith in the man!"

"Isn't this sudden?"

"Yes. You know May Belle, the half-blood girl? I have just seen her, and she told me a story you must hear. She has been ill, and out of school for some days; but she had seen the new principal and knew who he was. Late this afternoon she met him outside the town. She is a very pretty girl, and he must have seen it.

He stopped her, and she, knowing who he was, did not refuse to talk with him. He soon asked her for a kiss, and when she grew startled and would have fled, he seized her and took the kiss without leave. Evidently he did not suspect she was a pupil. Now, perhaps you will see why I asked as to his references."

Mr. Curtis gazed at his companion with a return of the old dismay. Her cheeks were flushed and he saw that a storm had been aroused he would have some trouble in quieting.

"Isn't there some mistake?" he finally asked.

"None at all."

"I can hardly believe it."

"I would not ask you to believe if I were not sure. I am sure; I made certain before I spoke to you. Now, I ask you if Mr. Eastman is a proper person to have charge of the young people in our school?"

"Perhaps he can explain it away."

"How can he?"

"I don't know."

"Nor I; it is an offense which cannot be explained away. The fact is beyond dispute that he is not fit to be in a school in which we have so much interest, and I feel that heroic measures should be exercised. The sooner he is sent away from Glory Eden, the better!"

Curtis was in despair. At the very start Eastman had broken his promise, and now he must uphold a man who had himself furnished the proof which condemned him. The mine-owner answered, but in a way so feeble and uncertain that Estella was surprised. He floundered hopelessly until he had an idea which, really, was the open avenue of reprieve—it was not one of escape—open to him.

"We must not take any rash step," he remarked, "but the proper way will be to retain Mr. Eastman until I can write to his references and see what they say. Yes, yes; that's the way to do. We'll leave it that way!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MAN-HUNTER SEEKS HIS PREY.

SINCE Strawberry Sam came to Glory Eden the question often had been asked: Was he in his right mind? and it had been asked more frequently of late than in any similar length of time before. Since ceasing work in the mine he had spent nearly all his time in the town, wandering about restlessly, and watching people with eyes which so glittered that women and children were learning to avoid him.

Those wild eyes told of a mind ill at ease, if not diseased.

Strawberry Sam was hunting for his man! His simple, superstitious faith had been worked upon until he was sure he was soon to find his prey. The birthmarked arm was flaunted in everybody's face, and the modern Ajax courted attack more persistently, more eagerly than ever before.

One of his revolvers he had loaded and sworn never to fire until his man appeared, and his right hand rested on that revolver several hours during the day.

He was not a pleasant man to have abroad, and even those who had no guilty secrets did not like to see a man-hunter stalking about the streets all the time. Some citizens had suggested that he ought to be deprived of his liberty, but, as usual in such cases, they were slow to move, and the big miner went on his way, bound up in his search.

On this night he retired as usual, and, as usual, dreamed. It was a rare thing for him to sleep without dreaming of the man he was hunting. Many of these dreams were picturesque, and he treasured all up in his mind. Each one had a meaning to him, and he studied the meaning out with gravity and good faith, and found therein a prophecy of the future, good or bad.

The dream of this occasion was one not easily interpreted as good. He thought he met his enemy in a lone gulch of the mountains, and received full confession from that person. Then he set out to avenge his wrongs, but his enemy suddenly became a giant eight feet tall, and in his hands was a sword of vast size; and with this the enemy attacked him, showering blow after blow upon his head and shoulders.

Strawberry Sam awoke in a fright, but the phantom fear was forgotten in a real surprise.

He had gone to sleep leaving the room dark; it was now light.

The ignited lamp stood on the table, but no one was visible.

Surprised by this fact the miner rose and searched the shanty. He was alone.

"Strange!" he muttered; "I know I put out the light, an' somebody must 'a' lit it. Hullo!"

His attention had been drawn to a scrap of paper by the lamp; something unusual, since Sam did not write or receive letters.

"The same writin'!" he exclaimed.

He read that writing, and found it as follows:

"STRAWBERRY SAM:—The Night and the Hour are come. Rouse from slothful slumber, go forth, and you shall find your enemy. Go to the hotel, ascend the piazza, and look for an open window into which the moon shines brightly. Take the word of no man—take not mine—but look for evidence. This day the man who sleeps in that room received some letters. When he retired, this night, he tossed the letters carelessly on the table. They are there now,

to speak for themselves; they will prove all I assert. Go, and you shall see your enemy. The Night and the Hour are come!"

Diogenes.

The miner flung the letter aside; he began to dress with feverish haste. His implicit reliance in the letter was that of a simple nature, but his purpose had no weakness.

He armed himself with knife and revolver; he left the shanty and hurried along the deserted street. The night was beautiful and bright with moonlight, but he gave it no heed. Only thoughts of violence were in his mind.

When he reached the hotel there was no sign of life. He went to the piazza, and an open window at once attracted his attention. It brought a surprise.

He had imagined that his enemy had just arrived in Glory Eden, and had expected to see an entire stranger, but, with his accurate knowledge of the hotel, was aware that no guest of mere hours had the room.

It was that of Bridle-path!

For awhile the miner stood in irresolution, put all at fault by the discovery, but a new explanation occurred to him. Perhaps Bridle-path had changed his room, and a stranger was there.

Even if this theory was incorrect, what proof had he that his enemy was not there? The surveyor had stood the test he made with strangers unwaveringly, but he might be the man. Whoever slept in the room, be it Bridle-path or some one else, the man-hunter was sure he had found his prey.

He drew out his knife and entered the room through the window.

The white moonlight streamed in, making a broad band through the room. It fell on the foot of the bed, but left the upper half in shadow. Some one was sleeping there, and as Sam caught sight of a hat on the table, he knew it was Bridle-path.

But this was not all. On the table lay an envelope, plainly revealed by the white light, and he raised it quickly. The address met his gaze, written in a bold hand, and he whispered the name almost chokingly:

"Richard Knox!"

The envelope was empty, and he dropped it as a thing no longer useful. He bent his gaze on the dimly-seen sleeper, and stood like a statue, but his face darkened with passions terrible to witness, and the moonlight played on the blade of the naked knife in his right hand.

He was terribly excited, and uncertain how to begin. The violence of his hatred and desire for vengeance prevented calm thought, and he could only stare at the man he had doomed.

Presently his sluggish wits began to work more actively, and he raised the knife and moved toward the bed.

His eyes gleamed more wildly than ever, and one movement was all that was necessary for the blow—a forward lunge, and the work of justice or wrong—which?—would be done.

There was no sound but the miner's own labored breathing, and success seemed certain, but, suddenly, out of the darkness came a revolver into the moonlight, and Sam found himself looking into the muzzle of a weapon he could not defy.

"Stop!" ordered a calm, cool voice.

Instinctively, the miner obeyed.

"If you make a hostile movement I shall press the trigger. Mark that down, and be prudent."

Bridle-path swung himself off the bed, and the two men stood facing each other. The surveyor advanced so close that his movement was strong proof of utter lack of fear.

Strawberry Sam, muscular and knife-armed, was an ominous antagonist, and a forward leap on his part would be tiger-like, but Bridle-path did not waver.

"Now," he added, after a pause, "what are you trying to do? You look more like an assassin than a thief, but neither game will work here. I am not such a sound sleeper that any man can prowl about my room and not waken me. What do you want?"

The spell broke, and Sam vehemently exclaimed:

"I want you!"

"Why?" was the terse inquiry.

"Because you're Richard Knox!"

"Nonsense!"

"It ain't nonsense; it's the truth. You hev fooled me, but I am on ter the truth now; you're him, an' this mark on my arm ain't nothin' new ter you. Dog that you be, you knew me when we first met, but you were crafty enough ter hide yer fear. But I know yer now; I know yer, an' I'll hev the vengeance I've long sought. You're Richard Knox, an' the hour o' your death has come!"

The miner was working himself up to a fury, but Bridle-path remained as calm as ever.

"What madness possesses you, man? I am not your enemy, and whatever harm he ever did should be placed where it belongs."

"You're him, an' you've got ter die. Your time—"

"Do you propose to kill me?"

"Yes."

"Change your mind! Give it up, for the scheme will not work. You are big and dangerous, I admit, but I do not fear you. You

will not kill me! Do you know why? It is because I am your master!"

"Eh?"

"I am the better man!"

Bridle-path stood more erect, and his gaze met the miner's with coolness which had no element of bluster. It was the composure of a brave man who felt sure of his position, and ability to maintain it.

Strawberry Sam was dazed for a moment. He was brave, too, but in a way purely animal; he could not understand heroism that had a cool, alert, intelligent mind back of it. Presently his anger broke out again.

"You boy!—you miser'ble little dandy! Why, I could take yer an' break yer right in two! You match me? It is rydicerous; it's a lie; it's mere brag; it's—"

"Stop and take breath, Samuel! Your will is good, but your grip on the Dictionary won't carry you through. Boasting is folly, but if I had any cause to hate you, sir, I would meet you in a mountain canyon, man to man, and settle it with revolver, knife or muscle. But I bear you no ill-will; I have no quarrel with you; and I don't want to do harm to any human being placed on this earth by Infinite will. When we take life, Sam, we take what we can't give back."

The surveyor had not talked without an object; he saw that he exercised an influence over the big miner; and as his voice grew more solemn, the ugly knife was slowly lowered.

"You look more agreeable!" Bridle-path added. "That fierce glare don't add to your beauty."

"You're a cunnin' devil," Sam agreed, "but it won't save yer."

"From what?"

"From me."

"Do you still sing the old song?"

"I come hyer ter kill," the miner doggedly replied, "an' I'll do it afore I leave this room. You can't bluff me; you've got ter go down!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MAN AND THE MOTIVE.

BRIDLE-PATH felt that he was gaining an ascendency over the miner, but caution was necessary.

"Let us sit down and talk it over," he suggested.

"No; we won't set down!" Strawberry Sam retorted. "We'll settle it right on our feet, an' now!"

Up went the knife again, but, as before, hostilities were checked by the ready revolver.

"Be calm, miner! You have got to prove what you allege before you wield that long blade on me. I deny that I am Richard Knox—"

"You lie, when you say it!"

"Prove it!"

"What o' that?"

Sam picked up the envelope and turned the superscription toward his companion.

"I see the name, but what have I to do with it?"

"It was on your table."

"Impossible!"

"But I say et was. It lay right thar, an' it shows who you be. Besides, I had a letter tellin' me the truth afore I come."

"A letter? From whom?"

"Never mind. It told me."

"Then it told you falsely. Come, Sam, this charge is absurd. You and I have met and been friends. Why should you accuse me? Somebody has been telling stories that won't wash, if you have any such letter. Sit down, and let me see it."

The stronger mind was triumphing over the weaker, and the miner very unwillingly took a seat. Then Bridle-path lighted the lamp and sat down close to the visitor, his manner as calm as ever.

"This envelope," he observed, "was put here by other hands than mine. I never saw it before; I never had a letter thus addressed. Inference: I have an enemy who has seen fit to set you upon me. Now for the letter you mention."

The miner passed it over, and Bridle-path read it quickly. His lips curled scornfully.

"How did you get this?" he asked.

Strawberry Sam told the story in his peculiar way.

"A fine state of affairs!" the listener commented. "This Diogenes is a fellow whose spite has run away with his brains, though who in this section can have any grudge against me I don't see. Look at the matter carefully, miner, and you will see the hoof and horns showing in it all. The same person who secretly put this letter in your shanty also laid the envelope on my table. No petty mischief-maker would go quite so far as to lay the train for a murder, and the unknown had one of two objects—to get rid of me and satisfy his grudge, or to make you down the wrong victim. If the last chance is correct, it was Richard Knox, himself, who set you on, hoping to save his own bacon at my expense; or, perchance, hoping you would be killed by me."

Logic was something Sam knew but little about, and he always went down before it. He was not convinced, but he was bewildered.

"I don't understand it," he admitted.

"Nor I, fully, but I am going to. It is no trifling matter to urge a man on to enter another's room at night and use a knife on him, and I am going to find out who has doomed me. We have the clew in the shape of the letter."

"What kin we find out by that?"

"Who wrote it, I hope. Some attempt was made to disguise the writing, but it was not a very elaborate job. I think it will be the means of betraying him, and if I learn his identity, we shall have a settlement that will be unpleasant to somebody."

Strawberry Sam was not so easily satisfied as this. His faith was shaken, but not destroyed. The childish element in his nature made him prone to cling to an idea; he clung to his suspicion now.

Bridle-path persevered, and, in the end, the miner gave up. He had lingering doubts, and it would not take much to send him on the war-path again, but he was out of his hostile mood for the time.

He apologized for his conduct toward the surveyor, and they parted amicably on the piazza.

"The next time you call," requested the young man, "select a different hour, if convenient, and let me know of your coming. It is not just pleasant to wake up and find a man prowling around your bed with a knife, at midnight."

Sam went away, and Bridle-path stood on the piazza and watched until the late visitor disappeared. Even then he kept his gaze riveted on one point, and his face indicated deep thought.

Who was responsible for the attack?

This was the all-important question, and one, perhaps, upon the prompt solution of which his life depended. He had suggested two theories for the underhand work of "Diogenes," but the most reasonable one was that the surveyor had some personal enemy who had tried to get rid of him in this cowardly way.

Who was it?

Bridle-path had never been a quarrelsome person, but he had lived in the wildest part of the foot-hills, and in the discharge of his duty he had made enemies who, more than once, had threatened volubly.

None of these men had he seen in Glory Eden, however, and he was confident he had made no fresh foes since arriving there.

"I must rise to-morrow with my eyes propped wide open," he thought. "I have an enemy, and he is a coward. The next blow may be direct from his own arm, and he will strike me in the back. The fellow must be caught before the act."

Arranging the window so that no one could again enter without disturbing him, the surveyor returned to bed. His adventure had not disturbed his nerves, and he slept soundly the remainder of the night, which passed without other nocturnal visitations.

In the morning he rose as usual and went to breakfast. He had decided not to mention the adventure to any one, and see if the instigator of the attack would betray himself in any way. Breakfast over, he went to the public room, where he found Strawberry Sam. The miner looked at him in a way anything but friendly.

"Good-morning, neighbor!" Bridle-path said, cordially.

"Mornin'!" Sam muttered.

"How are you, to-day?"

"I ain't wal; I didn't sleep none after I seen you last night."

"No? Why not?"

"I kep' a thinkin'. I kep' inquirin' to myself, Hev I done right ter let that man off? Is he Richard Knox, or ain't he? I ain't a hard man, an' don't want ter do wrong, ter nobody, but the looks is all ag'in' yer, an' I ain't sure I'm doin' correct ter b'lieve ye when the evidence is all on one side. I wish I did know, fer—fer—"

The birthmarked man's voice died away, and he sat trembling like a leaf, his gaze fixed blearily on the man by his side. A timid spirit would have shrunk from him then, but Bridle-path laid a firm hand on the marked arm.

"Sam," he responded, meeting the wild gaze mildly, yet unwaveringly, "don't let us rush this matter. I tell you I am not the man you seek, and I am not a man given to lying. Somebody is trying to deceive you outrageously, and it depends on you and me to find out who it is. To do this we must be cautious, patient and silent. I pledge my word to help you, and to remain right here until he is caught. I will yet prove to you that there is a villain at work against us."

Sam's trembling ceased. The surveyor still exercised strong influence over him, and his restless mood was quieted. It was again the strong mind and its influence over one that was weaker.

"Mebbe you're right," he confessed. "You've got a good hold on matters in general, an' you may see further inter this than I do. Ef you're right I shall be glad ter ax yer pardon, bime-by, fer I don't want ter do no man harm."

Bridle-path left him in this mood, but well aware that it would not last.

"The modern Ajax is not to be trusted," thought the young man. "He is so stirred up that reason is only visible to him when present-

ed by frequent blows of the hammer on the nail, as it were. Left alone, all his doubts will return, and another letter from 'Diogenes' will send his blood up to fever heat. Unless I can find out who Diogenes is I shall be in constant danger from Strawberry Sam, and there's no knowing but I shall get a shot in the back, next. I must learn who has poisoned Sam's mind against me."

The surveyor was in the street. He had gone out without any clear object in view, but, as he caught sight of Estella Curtis, some distance away, he remembered that he had promised to call at the school.

He looked at his watch. It lacked half an hour of the time for school-duties to begin, and he decided to walk over, inspect the building, and converse for a little while with the charming young teacher. He did not care to remain and listen to the dreary recitations.

When he arrived only Estella and three or four pupils were present. He was cordially received, and she began to talk of the school as only one much interested could. As chance would have it, Bridle-path had heard none of the gossip about the old superintendent and the new, and Estella was too much dissatisfied to refer to that subject.

Despite her protest, Eastman remained in office.

Estella and Bridle-path had finished what was to her important conversation, and, standing near each other, were talking laughingly, and giving gaze for gaze, when the superintendent appeared in the door.

He stopped short. He had been waiting all the morning for news that Strawberry Sam had done his work, but had come to the school in ignorance of how his scheme had resulted.

It was a disagreeable surprise to see Bridle-path alive and well, but it was not that which turned his careless face into the "thunder-cloud" of tradition.

He was an observing man, and he read much good will in the looks, the manner and the speech of the couple, though not a word was audible to him.

Wesley Charles was not the man to be long off his guard, but Bridle-path's gaze wandered a little too soon. He saw Eastman; he marked the scowl, the look of anger, jealousy and hatred on his face.

The expression vanished like a flash, and Wesley came forward careless and smiling.

"Good-morning, Miss Curtis. How are you, Bridle-path? A fine day, this."

He received a suitable reply.

"Have you a new pupil, Miss Curtis?" Wesley Charles continued, banteringly.

"I know of none."

"I referred to my friend here. I didn't know but you were teaching him? Or were you both pupils?"

Nothing could be more gracious and good-humored than Eastman's manner, but Estella's face flushed. It was pointed raillery, at the best, and she resented any such talk from the man she so disliked.

"I have devoted my time to architecture, rather than books," responded Bridle-path, coolly.

"Architecture in wood?"

"I never heard of architecture in water."

"Nor I, Mr.— By the way, I don't know your name."

"Bridle-path."

"Oh! I've heard that, of course, but I mean your real name. To me the fancy of you Westerners for sobriquets seems very odd, and I wonder what leads any one to shake his real name. I've asked before, but never had any comprehensive reply. If I may persevere in my request, why is it that you don't sail under your own name?"

Bland as Wesley Charles was, the surveyor understood very well what all this meant. Wesley wished to create the impression in Estella's mind that, perhaps, crime and fear of the law were responsible for the use of a sobriquet in this case.

Calmly and gracefully came the reply:

"You are wholly in error, in my case, Mr. Eastman. Odd as my name may seem to you, it is that under which I was baptized. I am Bridle-path; no more, and no less."

Wesley Charles was taken aback. Absurd as the claim was he felt that he was beaten, for he could not press the attack without betraying his animosity. All he could do was to let his previous insinuation rest in Estella's mind, and the easy way in which it had been met left it a thing which did not promise much.

Figuratively, he bowed to the inevitable.

"Well, I don't know why it isn't as good as any other name, and it's more novel. Miss Curtis, I have hired a boy to pluck and bring in some flowers. I thought they would be grateful to the pupils, and render their studies less grim and commonplace."

The new superintendent sunk into the solicitous official with great unction, and gazed upon the scholars present with a very fatherly air.

Bridle-path lingered only a few minutes more. No pupil in the school was so busy mentally as the surveyor when he walked down the street.

"Unless I am widely mistaken," he thought,

"my secret enemy is revealed. It was a jealous, murderous gaze Eastman bent on me as he stood by the door, and he tried, later, to blacken my reputation in Miss Curtis's eyes. Is it because of her that he set Strawberry Sam onto me? Do I know the man and the motive?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ISLAND-MAN'S RIFLE-SHOT.

BRIDLE PATH took his rifle and left the town. He always had led an active life, and no in-door refuge was to his taste. He ascended the eastern slope until a high point was reached, and then paused to look around.

The town lay well below, and his gaze instinctively sought the Curtis Free School. The place had suddenly assumed importance in his estimation.

Not for a moment did he doubt that his recent visit had given a reliable clew to the identity of the man who had set Strawberry Sam upon him. Swift to grasp a conclusion, he had decided in this case and never wavered. There might be more back of Eastman's spite than was known,—of that he was not sure—but he was inclined to think it a matter of mere jealousy.

Thus far Eastman's plot had not been a success. He had turned Bridle-path's mind to Estella; the surveyor thought of her more seriously than than ever before.

"A handsome, intelligent, amiable and charming girl," was his decision. "If it were I who was rich, and she was poor— But this is folly! I'll stick to the mountains; she wouldn't care for me, anyhow. I'll hunt other game, and do it at once."

He went on with his rifle ready for use. He was passing through a canyon when the rocks suddenly rung with the sound of a rifle, but it was not he who had fired. Instead, he lay prostrate on the ground, giving no sign of life. Then out from the rocks ran two men, one of whom placed his foot on the surveyor.

"Whoop! we've got him, Phin!" he exclaimed.

"Right you be, Roarin' Bill."

"No gals an' no Graf Giblon around this time ter put a veto on an honest man's work. Killed him at one shot, I did!"

"Better look an' make sure."

"No need o' that when Roarin' Bill Blood shoots. I'm a human giraffe that never looks erlong the rifle bar'l in vain. It's touch an' go, an' Gabriel toots his horn whenever I tickle the trigger. The young feller carried good weapons, an' they're mine. See?"

"I claim either the rifle or the revolvers."

"You do, hey? Say, who squinted the tube?"

"You did, but what of it? Couldn't I hav done the same? Et's no great trick. I claim my half!"

"Wal, you can't hav it!"

The island vultures confronted each other fiercely, and Roaring Bill's hand rested on his knife, ready to maintain his position at all hazards. Phin Hicks tried another resort.

"Now, see hyer, William, is this jest the right way ter use a pard? Ain't I allays divvied my whisky with you?"

"You've divvied the lion's share ter Phin Hicks; that's w'ot you've done. Besides, guns ain't whisky. You kin hav my old outfit, but them the young feller carried is jest w'ot yer Uncle William hez been pinin' fer. I fired the shot, an' I hav the goods. You hear me?"

"I hear yer, but it won't work. Why won't it? 'Cause it won't! No hog game, Bill Blood, fer I ain't built with a lamb's wool. Don't rile me, fer I'm a devil of a feller when my mad is up. Share an' share alike, or I'll fight fer it!"

"Fight et is, then!"

Roaring Bill drew his bowie, and flourished it in a menacing manner.

"Come an' see me!" he added. "Crawl inter my burrer an' wake up the centipede, ef ye hanker! Start the boundin' Bengawl tiger on a bender, ef ye dar'! Stir up the deadly human pestilence an' feel o' this pen-knife with yer ribs, ef it suits yer appetite!"

"Mebbe you think nobody but you kin shoot! retorted Phin. "Twas all an accident you hit him, anyhow. I seen the gun tremble as you aimed, an' yer eyes bulged out so they laid on the weepin' like two cabbage-heads. You shoot? Pah! Why, yer face was as white as alkali-dust, an' you'most fainted when you smelt powder!"

"That's wal said fer an old woman like you, but you can't hav his weepins."

"Ef you won't divvy, I'll fight fer my rights."

Out came Phin's knife, and he made a feint to begin the attack, but, instead, he made a quick dive and secured the rifle which had fallen from Bridle-path's nerveless hand. Roaring Bill established the right to his name by a great shout, and he leaped forward to the attack, but another rifle was thrust between the quarreling partners so suddenly that Blood ran against it and received a blow which caused him to sprawl ungracefully upon his back.

Not fully understanding what had happened he made haste to get his arms under him, and was about to rise when a clear and commanding voice checked him.

"Stop! Remain where you are, sir!"

Roaring Bill looked up and saw Cynthia Giblon. He saw something else, too; a revolver,

held in her steady hand, revealed a black cavity which impressed him strongly.

His dull wits were quickened by the instinct of self-preservation, and he managed to find words.

"That you, gal? I'm glad you've come, fer I've been assaulted. The young feller set on me, an' most did me up; but I managed ter win, only I's so powerful weak at the end that I jest tumbled over like a dead dog."

"Your simile is good; you could liken yourself to nothing else so appropriately as to a dog; but your lie won't work. I saw all, and— Stay where you are, sir!"

"But I want ter git up."

"You can't! Lie where you are!"

"But the sand hurts my spine, an' will sile my trowsers—"

"Lie right there on your back, or I'll shoot you as I would a wolf. Phin Hicks, you are in fine business, ain't you?"

"Twa'n't me, Cythia. Roarin' Bill did the shootin'."

"You dodge like a coward. I know you, and I know Bill Blood; I hold you both guilty."

"Mebbe you want yer share now, Phin?" suggested Roaring Bill, seeking the one grain of malicious consolation.

"Is he dead?" Cythia continued, pointing to Bridle-path.

"Dunno."

"Look for the wound. Where did you aim, Bill?"

"At his head."

"That don't count," growled Phin. "You never knowed Bill ter hit whar he aimed; the wound ez more likely ter be in ther critter's feet. Bill never hits nothin' only when he shoots his mouth at a whisky-bottle!"

This retort on Bill eased his mind a good deal, but Cythia imperatively ordered:

"Search!"

"Sart'in, sart'in; I wuz jest goin' ter," was the humble reply.

Phin knelt down, but immediately paused, looked at the ground, and then picked up a flattened bullet.

"That's it," he announced.

"Nonsense."

"But it is. What other bullet should be hyer? Look at the little red broose on his for-rud, too. Tell yer how it wuz, fer I seen another case jest like it, once. He was a-carryin' his rifle so it rested ag'in his head—mebbe, wuz jest goin' ter shift it. Anyhow, he had it in slack hold, an' the ball struck the weapon, knocked it ag'in his head, an' stunted him."

"Impossible!"

"Et did t'other feller, anyhow. Mebbe you think ef one side of a rifle-barrel lay ag'in yer head, an' a bullet should hit ker-slap ag'in the other, after travelin' only a few rods, et wouldn't hurt? You kin gamble it would stun any feller. This chap ain't bad hurt, now you bet; ther bullet struck jest right ter flatten out an' drop dead. The man dropped *alive!*"

Phin held Cythia in too much awe to ask that his theory be taken without further proof, and he looked diligently for a wound, but, except for the slight bruise, no injury was to be found on Bridle-path's head, and cursory examination revealed no trouble elsewhere.

"He's all right," the outlaw decided.

"No thanks to you."

"Roarin' Bill did it."

"I'll git up an' explain—"

Blood made a movement to do as he said, but Cythia interrupted.

"Stop! Stay right where you are. You and Phin Hicks have taken the bit in your teeth until I must know where you are in order to trust you. Lie there on your back, sir!"

Roaring Bill muttered some words under his breath which would have injured his standing in good society, but Cythia always had been accustomed to lord it over the island-men, and he bowed to his fate.

If old ties of affection and allegiance were loosened much more the time was near at hand when the lawless brute would throw all restraint to the winds, but, now, he was like an ugly cur which longs to make attack, but dares not.

"The young feller is comin' around," declared Phin. "Bill's recklessness ain't done no harm, but he wuz wrong; Bill wuz."

Blood glared at his friend, but said nothing. Phin was taking revenge, but his time would come, and rich would be the harvest. No small revenge would make amends for the ignominy of lying there on his back.

Cythia saw that Bridle-path was, indeed, recovering, and regained her wits enough to send Phin for water.

"Say, gal, lemme git up," requested Bill, humbly.

"You can lie where you are!"

"Ain't my good will wu'th nothin' ter you?"

"Nothing!"

"All right; all right! One o' these days you'll be in need o' help, an' then we'll see whar Roarin' Bill comes in. You despise him now, but he's helped yer afore, an' you may call on him ag'in when you're in need. He's always come like yer dog in the past. Will he come when you call next? You bet! Oh! yes; pooty likely. Why? 'Ca'ze you're a-usin' on him so white now. He'll come! Oh, yes!"

Mr. Blood growled like a sore-headed bear, but Cythia paid no attention to him. Bridle-path was stirring; he suddenly opened his eyes, seized his rifle and sprung to his feet.

"What has happened?" he demanded, with a bewildered air.

"Be at ease; all trouble is over. You have been stunned by a bullet, but not wounded."

"Ha! I grasp the situation. I owe a debt to the greasy knave who lies there on his back!"

CHAPTER XIX.

UNSHAPED SHADOWS OF TROUBLE.

ROARING BILL groaned, but had nothing to say. He did not object to being accused of carrying grease or dirt, but to be termed a knave jarred his sensitive feelings. He no longer meditated immediate mischief, but due regard for his own safety made him alert and ready to meet any attack upon himself.

"I trust you are not injured," remarked Cythia, anxiously, addressing the surveyor.

"If so, I do not feel it," Bridle-path returned.

"But your man fired to kill, no doubt."

"Call him not my follower; I have cast him off."

"A good job. I would like to know what spite he has against me."

"Men need no cause when they have sold themselves to the Evil One."

"An eye for an eye is the old Jewish law. He shot me down from ambush. What is to prevent me from paying him back with rifle and bullet? But let that pass. I don't understand how I was stunned, yet feel no wound."

Cythia had just finished an explanation when Phin Hicks returned with his hat full of water.

"Hyer's the nectar o' life," he remarked, "an' ef the gent will bathe in it he'll feel reju-ventiated."

"Thank you," Bridle-path retorted, "but water carried in such a disreputable hat must be thick with grease and dirt. Take the bath yourself, Phinens, and never mind me. Miss Giblon, your followers are wanted at Glory Eden. I am not a finical person, but I have an aversion to being shot down like a mountain sheep. About ten years in State Prison will give them a chance to meditate a trifle on past and future, and a good deal on the present."

"Et was all a mistake," protested Phin, hurriedly. "Bill's gun, it went off by accident, ez he was combin' of his whiskers."

"You lie fluently, but illogically; accidents sometimes happen to honest men, but seldom to rascals. I shall have to arrest you."

"I beg that you will overlook their offense if you can," interposed Cythia, hurriedly. "It would bring fresh opprobrium on the island-people, and, even without cause, we are hated at Glory Eden, already."

"I yield to your wishes. To you I owe a debt of gratitude, and I am not ungrateful. I want to say to these men, however, that two attacks is all I can endure from them. The meanest creature will strike back when hard pressed, and I shall not be outdone by that part of creation. Beware of the third attack! Next time, I shall give blow for blow, shot for shot. Miss Giblon, the air is not good near these ruffians."

"Go!" Cythia directed.

Phin was glad to get the order, but Roaring Bill went with a sullen and hostile air. His pride had been wounded to the quick by the shame of lying there on his back under compulsion, and his heart was filled with bitter hatred. He took his weapons and slunk away, but in a suggestive manner.

"Your hold on yonder men is fragile," Bridle-path observed, thoughtfully.

"It is firm enough, though they are given to growling, like all dogs."

"I do not agree with you."

"Anyway, they are not worth minding."

"You ought to know, but I venture to say that they will yet convince you to the contrary. They are full of mischief and liable to break out at any moment; that's the way I size them up. Yet, I hope they will not bring condemnation on Lucifer Annex. How is it, Miss Giblon; you live at the island, and should be in the secrets of those there; are the island-people peacefully disposed?"

"Emphatically, yes! Why should you think otherwise?"

"My experience has shaken my faith."

"Simply on account of Blood and Hicks! Surely, you are not so unjust as the old residents of Glory Eden, and disposed to condemn us all because of the acts of a few of our numbers?"

Cythia spoke with mingled sadness and resentment, but Bridle-path did not see fit to tell her that it was the vague rumors of a plot on Graf Giblon's part, not the acts of Phin and Bill, that led him to be suspicious.

"I condemn no one hastily, I hope, and I trust I shall not have to think ill of your people."

Cythia did not answer. She stood pouting and looking down, while her trim little foot beat a tattoo on the ground. Her strikingly friendly manner of a few moments before had given place to anger that would have broken forth in fierce, Giblon-like reproaches if the offender had been any one but Bridle-path.

He studied her; he measured her with expertness. With diplomatic skill he proceeded to put

her in good humor, and to convince her that he had no spite or prejudice against Lucifer Annex.

She was led out of her sullenness much like a child, and, when it was over, was similarly gay and friendly.

Bridle-path was not working with any petty motive. The conversation previously heard between Roaring Bill and his associates pointed to a general conspiracy, and the events of the last hour told how far the lawless spirit of the island-men was likely to lead them. Bill Blood had acted the bully on the lake-shore; this day, he had acted the assassin.

There was cause for his sudden boldness.

Did Cythia know the cause?

For a long time Bridle-path lingered in conversation, but the result led him to one conclusion: Either the outlaw's daughter was far deeper than she seemed; or she knew of no conspiracy.

They parted near the lake.

"Won't you go over to the island?" Cythia asked.

"Not now."

"When? If you think us worth visiting, why not come to-night? I will meet you at the point, and row you over. You have seen the island by day; why not, at night?"

Bridle-path was about to give a courteous refusal when many new thoughts came to him suddenly.

There was never much activity among plotters by day. If he went at night, was it not possible he would make discoveries? Could he not better study the men, then?

He did not forget that danger—perhaps a trap—lay back of the invitation, but no peril was enough to shake the calm bravery that was so much a part of his nature. After a very natural hesitation, he answered that he would accept the invitation.

"What shall be the time?" he added.

"Will eight o'clock do?"

"No better time could be named."

"Then I will be at the usual landing-place of my boat, at that hour."

"I will not disappoint you."

They separated, and Bridle-path continued his hunt. He found some game, which he took back to Glory Eden and presented to the landlord. That afternoon he took a long nap, feeling that he could not be too alert when at the island; and at the proper hour made his way to the rendezvous.

He was there before Cythia, and sat down to wait.

Presently, a dark spot appeared on the lake, and shortly was distinguishable as a boat with a single occupant. It was Cythia, and the craft soon touched the shore. The surveyor had remained quiet, and, in the darkness, she did not see him until, as she was looking around with an air of disappointment, he rose and went forward.

"I feared you were not coming!" she exclaimed.

"I carry no double face, but always keep my promise. Here I am at your service."

"Enter, and you shall see the island by night."

He obeyed, and she rowed away. He sat in the stern, his rifle resting across his knee, and while keeping up conversation on matters trivial to him, did not fail to scan the island narrowly. The bushes hung low, and a dozen enemies might be concealed there.

They touched the shore, disembarked, and Cythia again led the way. No one else was seen by Bridle-path. This time it was a more familiar place, but when they came in sight of the collection of shanties he found a new and novel scene.

The abiding-place of the island-people was better lighted than was to be expected, and though the darkest of shadows existed in some places outside, there was light enough in others to show that nearly all were out of doors. Children were not abundant, but slovenly women gossiped at the doors, and men stood around in groups.

The latter talked, also, but there was something so earnest and attentive in their manner that Bridle-path could not believe they spoke on inconsequential subjects. Their dirt and unkempt condition did not show then, but their muscular figures stood out in bold relief, picturesque and impressive.

Men to be trifled with they certainly were not.

"This is the hour of general good feeling and neighborly talk," remarked Cythia.

"I see. There is always something striking about the social conversation of men and women who are untrammeled by the petty restrictions of fine society. Suppose we go near these rugged miners and listen to their talk."

"It would be a waste of time," returned Cythia, hurriedly. "My father is waiting to see you in our cabin, before he goes out on business."

"Very well: we will go there. The big miner can talk to the point as closely as any man I know."

Graf Giblon was found at the shanty, and he gave Bridle-path cordial welcome. He certainly was impressive as he stood before the visitor, a huge wall of bone and muscle; and

the sound of his voice was hearty, and the grasp of his broad hand strong and warm.

Bluffly he assured the younger man he was glad to see him, and then he sat down to act the host.

If Graf had any important thoughts in his mind he did not betray them. He talked on commonplace subjects, and chiefly of gold-digging, but he was always hearty and cordial.

Anon he spoke of the other work to which Cythia had referred, and, without explaining what it was, left the shanty. Again was the surveyor left alone with the girl.

Bridle-path was puzzled. He knew he was marked by Graf as a person who was to be useful, but in what way? Cythia he could read easier, and, reading her, he believed she was no more than a cat's-paw in Graf's hands. She was the unsuspecting decoy of a man who had a plot.

What was that plot?

CHAPTER XX.

FROM AN OUTLAW'S LIPS.

BRIDLE-PATH noticed a book on the table, and looking at it, found it was Gibbon's *Rome*.

"This is an odd place for such a work," he remarked.

"Why so?" Cythia answered. "It is said we are barbarians. Why shouln't we like to read how the barbarians of old marched upon and overthrew haughty Rome?"

Intentionally or otherwise, the remark was suggestive.

"Do you contemplate a like movement?" inquired the surveyor, carelessly.

"The book is a memento of my school-days," remarked the girl, overlooking the question.

"May I ask you where you went to school?"

"Not at Glory Eden. The proud nobodies at the Curtis school would hardly be congenial companions. My school-days were passed far from here, and were happy enough. I fretted at restraint, but books were sufficiently fascinating to over-balance the restraint. I was told that I learned quickly, and my memory certainly was excellent. All this ended when I was fourteen, but I have had a box of books here, and reading has kept up my studies in a measure, I may say."

"Do you really like this wild life?"

Cythia's eyes sparkled.

"It is grand!" she declared.

"But have you congenial company?"

"Yes; my books, boat, rifle and—Nature!"

"But girls of your age—"

"Bah! don't mention them. Women are sly and deceitful; given to mean and underhand ways, jealous and treacherous; and in all the world there is no one, and nothing, so given to harsh judgment and unconquerable hate as are women!"

"Your condemnation is sweeping; I have a better opinion of your sex. Has not your opinion been influenced too much by the harsh verdict of Glory Eden, as a whole?"

"I never did them harm."

"True, but you are—"

"Graf Giblon's daughter!"

"An odd thought has come to me. Are you his daughter?"

"What else should I be?"

"I know not; I never heard of you, or him, until I came to Glory Eden, a few days ago. But I see little Graf Giblon about you—"

"I am like my mother."

"Do you remember her?"

"Dimly. Let us not speak of her; she had my good qualities, without my bad ones, and life with Graf Giblon was not pleasant to her. But, sir, weave no web of romance about me: I am Graf's daughter, plain and simple. I know that. Let us change the subject."

"One word. You are fitted for a better life than this."

"Is the door open?"

"All doors open gradually. You should go elsewhere and begin life anew; you should give your intelligence and womanly qualities chance to expand. The chance is not here; the men of this island are no less than a mill-stone which is ever dragging ye down."

"What is to raise me?"

"Separation from them, and earnest effort."

"All well enough to say—it's always easy to advise others—but it takes more than that. When people are drawn out of a whirlpool, it is by means of help. Who would help me?"

Cythia looked directly at Bridle-path, and he felt that he was on delicate footing. He could read clearly enough to know that she had not invited him to the island twice without an object, and he did not believe she was in any plot which Graf might have in mind.

It was necessary to proceed with caution, and this he did. Evading the reckless promise that he would be the one to help her along, he gave some good advice—advice which, however, jarred on his own ears, after her observation on that point.

Both the young people were dissatisfied with the interview at this point, realizing what a farce it was, and Bridle-path finally broke the evil spell by suggesting that they go to walk.

This movement again brought him in sight of

the other villagers, and he was further impressed by their appearance. The men kept their rifles with them in a matter-of-fact way, and ragged though they were bodily, all their weapons were of the newest pattern, and were well kept.

They would make bad enemies in a fight.

Bridle-path would have gone among them, but Cythia promptly turned him the other way. She was not less shrewd than he, and though she really did not know of any such plot as her companion suspected, she was well aware that his opinion of the island-people would not be heightened by going near them.

Her little piece of strategy did not please Bridle-path, who, anxious to have a careful, thorough look at the island, tried strategy in return.

"It is getting late," he remarked, carelessly, "and I will not trouble you to row me to the mainland. I'll take one of the boats, pull myself over, and leave the craft at the usual place on the north shore."

"Thank you, but I could not think of letting a guest do that," she returned. "I will row you over."

He could not urge the matter without showing undue anxiety, so he submitted as gracefully as possible. They went slowly to the landing, and then crossed. After that Cythia could not very well find excuse for going further, but she hesitated and seemed reluctant to return. He noticed her downcast air, but made no reference to it until she abruptly asked:

"Do you ever have a presentiment?"

"Yes."

"Are they followed by evil?"

"About once in ten times. I have moments of depression, when a sense of trouble is upon me, I know not why or whence. As a youth I listened to these warning voices, but soon found they amounted to nothing as harbingers of misfortune. I can answer for no one else, but, in my case, attribute them to dyspepsia, or, possibly, poor circulation of blood."

This very practical reply did not discourage Cythia.

"I am not usually in this mood, but I now feel that trouble is coming. Will it be to me, or—to you?"

"Why to me?"

"You remember the attack on you to-day?"

"True. Manly confidence would lead me to say it will not occur again, but the cold facts that I was then prostrate and helpless before I knew danger was near, is a dampener on pride. Still, I would not turn out to avoid Roaring Bill and his amiable associate; I shall never rest easy until they and I settle our score. Let that pass. Do I interrupt you?"

"I only wish to impress upon you that I have a sense of impending trouble."

"From the islanders?"

"And why from them?"

"Have you no enemies?"

"I can safely say I have none, I think. My people are plain and rough, but their hearts are all right. No; I fear no harm from that source, myself, but my presentiment is too vague to be analyzed. Somehow, though, I feel that it is not safe to have you leave me."

"I will accompany you back to the island—"

"No, no; it is not that. 'Tis rather as if we might never meet again."

"Miss Giblon, if this fear is as shadowy as you claim, just dismiss it from your mind. It will never spread its wings for flight."

Despite this prediction, Cythia lingered for some time longer, and when she went it was with visible reluctance. Finally she entered the boat and rowed back toward the island. Bridle-path stood motionless until the dimly-seen boat touched the shore; then he aroused and stood beating a restless tattoo with his fingers on the barrel of his rifle.

He meditated, and ended by secreting the weapon in a niche among the rocks. Then he walked out on the point, entered the water and swam quietly toward the island. Reaching the vicinity, he reconnoitred, and finally landed.

His desire to see the place without any restraint had overcome all other feelings, and he now walked toward the shanties. His manner was wary, and he desired to avoid being seen. Suspicious, jealous and bitter as the island people were, he might not be well received if known to be there secretly, and it certainly would widen the breach between them and Glory Eden if they thought a spy was at work.

Nearing the hovels, he saw the same scene before set before him—the gossiping women and the grim, armed men.

Selecting the way carefully, he approached the rear of one of the shanties, where the shadows lay darkly. He reached the cover, but was not at first rewarded. The various groups talked on, but he found nothing of interest. While he was watching them thoughtfully, two men came forward so suddenly that, though he thought they were going to pass to his side of the structure, he had no time to retreat.

He stood motionless, ready to make the best of the situation, but they stopped just around the corner, and one gave the other a flask.

"You'll find it the best o' whisky," he asserted.

The second man sampled it, and agreed with the statement.

"But this is only an excuse," pursued the first speaker; "I wanted chance ter talk with yer alone. I've jest seen Graf Giblon."

"Anything new?"

"The hour is comin' nigh when we strike!"

"Good! It can't come none too quick."

"Glory Eden shall shake under our tread!" cried the first man, with suppressed vehemence and rude eloquence. "Them who hev so long gone arrogantly through her streets shall be bumbled, an' the people they hev despised shall hev their heels on her neck!"

"I long fer it, fer I hev scores ter wipe out. What are Graf's plans?"

"That I don't know; he will tell 'em ter nobody. Of one thing I am sure: Cythia an' her new beau are ter be cat's paws. She is mashed on him, an' Graf encourages it, fer it is ter our interest. Why, I don't know; I kin only tell that it's Graf's idee ter git that Bridle-path so wound up with us that he will help at Glory Eden."

"Ingenious Graf!" thought "that Bridle-path," but the statue-like poise of his figure was not changed.

"What are we ter expect at the town, anyhow?" continued the man who was being enlightened.

"Booty!"

"Big or little?"

"All that Glory Eden has."

"No!"

"When we get through, the place will be in ashes, an' what we see fit ter take will be ours!"

"But we'll be hunted fer the rest of our lives."

"What of it? Is that anything new in our experience?"

"I'm not the man to take water, an' whatever the boys decide on, they will find me right along with them; but I confess that after a stormy career fer fifteen year, an' constant dodgin' o' sheriffs, the peaceful life o' the island has been welcome. But I'm with the boyees; you know that."

"Of course."

"It'll be a bold move ter burn the town."

"Booty fer our good; the conflagration fer revenge. Graf Giblon has a new refuge picked out, som'ers; we'll jest shoulder the plunder we kin carry easy, an' then hustle fer other scenes. That's what I had ter say. Hold yer tongue, comrade, an' don't let the bulk o' the gang know the tip. Graf wants them ter rest on half-knowledge until the train is ready ter be fired."

"My jaws won't wag ter the hurt o' the scheme."

"All right. Now let's go back."

They took another drink, and then retired, unsuspecting of the proximity of one not friendly to the hopes. Bridle-path mechanically replaced the revolver he had drawn half-way from his belt.

"A fine plot!" he muttered. "Glory Eden never has misjudged Lucifer Annex."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TRIO GO ONE STEP TOO FAR.

The figures in the circle of light were more impressive than ever, now, and the rough faces and gladiator proportions of the men had new meaning. At any time they would make enemies not to be despised, while, banded and bent on plunder and destruction, there was no limit to the damage they possibly might do.

Bridle-path did not pause to watch them for any great length of time. He had known from the first that he could not mix with them prudently, and now the necessity of keeping their suspicions down became apparent.

After a short time he turned and beat a cautious retreat. He saw no one by the way, and soon reached the water. Again he swam over to the point, and had soon recovered his rifle. Then he went back to Glory Eden.

Once before he had warned Mayor Allen that, perhaps, mischief was brewing, but he decided to see that official again, and at once. Measures must be taken in a defensive way, for nobody, unless it was Graf Giblon, knew when the blow would fall.

When he entered the town he was impressed with the fact that more men than usual were visible on the street, and the persons composing the group he first reached were talking so earnestly that he joined them and listened.

"I say, the proper way is ter string 'em right up!" declared a shaggy laboring man.

"Don't preach that doctrine hyer!" retorted another.

"Why not?"

"Because Glory Eden don't do things that way. This hyer is a law-abidin' town, an' lynch law is a curse ter civilization, an' the way of brutes. That goes in any case, while in this, thar ain't no excuse fer violence."

"No excuse? Didn't them outlaws git drunk an' whoop things up? Didn't they shoot inter winders an' houses, an' smash things? Didn't they wound Stover, when he resented it?"

"Stover ain't bad hurt, an' we've had sech cases afore, when others painted the town red—"

"But these men was from Lucifer Annex."

"What of it?"

"We've got ter bruise them serpents, an' the way ter do et is ter string up the three we've got."

Again this sanguinary advice was severely rejected, and Bridle-path pushed forward.

"Who are the men you mention?" he asked.

"Their names are Roarin' Bill Blood, Phin Hicks an' Center-shot Steve."

"Do you say they are under arrest?"

"Yes. They came hyer loaded ter the muzzle with whisky, an' undertook ter run things. They succeeded fer awhile, but kinder took a tumble when they was run in. They'll feel meek afore they git out; I heerd the mayor say he should keep 'em in jail until next month, an' then send 'em ter the county seat, fer the grand jury ter deal with."

Bridle-path commented no further, but soon withdrew from the group, and went in search of the mayor. He found that dignitary in his office, and soon received confirmation of all he had before heard.

"Lucifer Annex needs a lesson," Allen declared, "and now is the time to give it. Three weeks later the Grand Jury meets. I shall hold Blood and his fellow ruffians right in our jail until then, and then send them over for trial. Stover isn't badly hurt, but I'll teach the Lucifer gang not to use the revolver on any of our people."

"Why not let the roughs off with a small fine?"

"Haven't I just told you why?"

"Let me tell you why."

Briefly, but forcibly, Bridle-path explained the situation at the island as he saw it; as it had been revealed to him by the late conversation near the shanty. The mayor was astonished.

"The vile dogs!" he cried, "so they would plunder and burn our town. Let them try it, if they dare! Why, we would sweep every one into the next world, which, for them, is low down. Burn Glory Eden? Let them try it! We will fix them!"

"Mr. Allen, do you think they would come in open way, in broad daylight? Barbarians strike at night."

"You put it strongly, I confess, but you do not voice the sentiments of the town. We always have approved of severe measures against that gang, and our people would not hear to anything else."

"Believe me, I do not wish to be officious, but what I have seen has impressed me deeply. Those men are fighters, every one."

"So are we."

"Well, the game is yours to play, not mine."

"You suggest that the three toughs be let off with a fine. Why?"

"I am afraid trouble will come at once, if you hold on to them. Graf Giblon's plot has not yet taken shape. Why not secure the delay that plot would give you, and improve the lull to make preparations? Were I in charge here, I would have a cannon, making its acquisition ostensibly for celebrations, but, really, to meet attack."

"You are too level-headed a man to be laughed at, and there is prudence, at least, in your counsel, but our people would not bear to such a course. Unless the voice of the public changes before to-morrow, Roaring Bill Blood and his fellows will be put on trial for assault with intent to kill, and, of course, held for the higher court."

Bridle-path carried the argument no further. He was perfectly willing that Glory Eden should manage its own affairs; he had done his duty in all respects, and was content to go to the rear and watch the progress of events.

The mayor gave thanks in due form, and was as friendly as ever, so when Bridle-path went away it was with mutual good feeling.

The surveyor retired and passed a peaceful night.

The following morning he was not in a hurry to leave the hotel, and he idled his time away there until nearly ten o'clock, when a citizen came in with the information that the arrested men from the Annex were to have their hearing at once.

It was something Bridle-path did not wish to miss, and he walked over to the court-room, which occupied the greater part of the jail.

No crowd was in attendance. Men who were in the habit of working were not going to cease operations to see three drunken ruffians tried. There was indignation against them, but it seemed that the proper officers were able to care for them.

Hence, less than thirty persons came to the trial, and many of these were minors and women.

Bridle-path regarded the prisoners with interest when they were brought in.

Roaring Bill led, walking with a swagger, rolling his eyes about, and scowling upon those present. When they were seated it was to be seen that they were disheveled of dress, hair and beard, and blood-shot of eyes. They looked the crowd over, and the two lesser ruffians betrayed brief disappointment at seeing none of their boon companions, but they soon fell into

line and imitated Blood in his coarse defiance. The mayor was the only trial justice in Glory Eden, and he proceeded to put the machinery in operation. This he did with a formal opening, and then proceeded:

"Prisoners at the bar, the question seems superfluous in this case, but how plead you to the charge of shooting Septimus Stover. Are you guilty, or not guilty?"

Roaring Bill leaned forward deliberately, and so expertly ejected a mouthful of tobacco-juice in a long range shot that he hit an inoffensive dog in the eye, causing the animal to yelp mournfully.

"Not guilty!" declared Mr. Blood, presently.

"But four men saw the shooting done."

"We kin prove an alibi."

"What?"

"We wa'n't thar!"

"You were taken on the spot."

"Not us, but our twin brothers."

The audacious prisoner now took a shot at the boot of a citizen, and would have been chastised then and there if the irate victim had not been forced away.

"You will gain nothing by contempt of court, sir!" declared the mayor sternly.

"I ain't goin' ter try; everybody knows you're contemptible!"

"Sheriff, keep that man quiet!" shouted Allen.

"Yes," agreed Roaring Bill, "an' while you're erbout it, sheriff, make that gorilla shut up!"

The speaker's expression remained grim, and he pointed to the mayor without the least evidence of feeling, but Allen's face was white with anger. The insolence of the prisoner cut to the official heart, and, certainly, he would have been destitute of pride to take such language calmly.

"Sheriff," he finally found words to gasp, "if this knave wags his tongue in such style further, I bid you gag him!"

"I'll do it, too, by thunder!"

Blood rolled his tobacco, ejected another quantity of juice, and turned to Phin Hicks:

"Reckon we're likely ter hev quite a spell o' dry weather, ef it don't rain," he observed.

Phin and Steve were convulsed with amusement over the rare wit of their ally, but, unlike him, were prudent enough to do nothing to arouse further anger against themselves. Bill was oblivious to prudence.

Inferring that the prisoner was partially quelled, however, Allen announced:

"The trial will now proceed."

"Ef thar's a trial hyer, it'll be one o' bullets!"

So spoke a loud voice, and the speaker walked close to Allen's desk. A deep hush fell upon those present—a startled silence.

CHAPTER XXII.

KING GIBLON BEARDS THE LION.

WHILE the war of words had been going on a man had approached the court-room and paused at the door. Beneath his heavy brows were barbarian-like eyes, and it would be less an exaggeration than it might seem to say that those eyes blazed with light—certainly, there was a glitter in them which would make the figurative language not inappropriate.

Not long did he pause. Entering boldly he strode toward the principal actors in the scene, roughly elbowing aside those who chanced to be in his way, and reached his destination in time to utter that defiant retort:

"Ef thar's a trial hyer, it'll be one o' bullets!"

Every eye was turned upon the loud-voiced speaker, and then a fresh shock went around.

The intruder was Graf Giblon!

Even Mayor Allen looked in stupefaction.

The redoubtable chief of Lucifer Annex had come as he always went, but when he allowed the breech of his rifle to drop heavily to the floor, his weapons had a meaning never noticed before. The handsome, shining rifle; the heavy revolvers and the long-bladed bowie—the man was simply perfectly armed, and his armament had a voice of its own.

Closer than ever were Graf's brows drawn together; fiercely gleamed his eyes; set were his bull-dog like jaws, and his massive figure had never been more erect, more imposing.

And never before had his manner been so ominous.

The opposition wavered for a moment. They were brave enough, but Graf was not a man to be laughed at. Why not use him with mildness, even if he had come in roughly?

"Mr. Giblon," spoke Allen, "do you appear as a friend of the accused?"

"Do I? Wal, I reckon! I'm hyer ter take 'em away."

"Are you aware they are under arrest?"

"I don't care a cuss whether they be or not. They're g'wine back ter the island with me!"

"Not at present, Mr. Giblon—"

"Yes, now!"

"Wait! Hear the charge against them—"

"I know all you kin tell, so don't dislarkate yer jaws on no whopdoodle words fer my benefit. I don't know *hibbus curpuus* from a *shupeny*, but when it comes ter English, I kin talk."

The island gladiator thumped his rifle down on the floor, and sturdily added:

"I don't want no p'inters from you doughheads!"

Prudence could not exist before such language as that, and Allen lost his temper.

"Are you here as a witness?" he demanded.

"No."

"Bail will not be accepted."

"I don't keer a cuss fer bail."

"Then, since you have no legal business here, you will either sit down and keep quiet, or leave the court-room."

"I'll go when I git ready, an' not before. Don't you flatter yerselves I want ter stay hyer longer than is necessary, fer I don't. Take them irons off from my men!"

"We shall do nothing of the kind. Giblon are you crazy? What do you mean by coming here and making such talk?"

"I mean that you hev no right ter molest the men o' my town. The island ain't a part o' Glory Eden, an' you can't claim it, nor its citizens. We ain't your slaves, an' don't you think we be; we're free men, an' that's what we'll remain. You kin arrest yer own dudes all you want ter, but you can't put irons on my men!"

"Be careful, Giblon, or you will be arrested for contempt of court."

"No, I won't, fer ther ain't men enough in this miserable town ter take me; I ain't afeerd ter say it. See! I've come hyer all alone. Thar are plenty o'men at the island; men who kin use rifle an' revolver as wal as any in the West; men who bear you no good will; but I wanted none o' their help. I'm hyer alone, but perfectly able ter do my business. I want you ter know you can't use the island men like dogs. Will you set them free, or shall I take them by force?"

"Giblon," exclaimed the mayor, astonished and bewildered, "are you in your right mind? Do you know you are only one man against seven score—and talk like that?"

"I know."

"And you persist in your wild assertion?"

"I'm goin' ter take them away!"

Coolly the redoubtable outlaw pointed to Roaring Bill and the other prisoners—as coolly as if he had an army at his back.

Bridle-path knew not whether to admire the dauntless courage of the man, or pity his weakness; he knew not which actually existed. That Graf should come alone and defy the whole town scarcely seemed the act of a sane man, but Graf's manner was calm and impressive.

One man against a town! If Bridle-path wavered in his opinion, he certainly did not fail to listen raptly.

The mayor, the sheriff, and all the citizens of Glory Eden seemed to be under a species of stupification; they could hardly realize that they were defied in such a fashion.

"This has gone far enough!" declared Allen, a flush appearing on his face. "We cannot endure everything. Mr. Sheriff, if Giblon does not keep quiet, I direct you to eject him from the room. If he resists, put him under arrest!"

The sheriff moved close to Graf's side, but it was the worst move he could have made. In his hand he unconsciously held a bunch of keys, among them being the great key of the jail; and this collection was suddenly snatched from his hand by the outlaw.

One spring took Graf to the side of his followers. Instinct, previous knowledge, or good judgment, enabled him to find the proper key, at once; one turn of his wrist liberated Roaring Bill.

"Unlock the others!" ordered the leader.

Then he turned and faced the men of Glory Eden, and none too soon. The sheriff, mad with rage at being thus robbed, was about to leap upon the robber, but Graf swung his clubbed rifle and knocked the official down.

Of course the latter's fellow-citizens were in sympathy with him. There was a forward movement, in which all the men but Bridle-path took part, and it looked as if Graf would be overwhelmed at once; but yet again he swung the rifle with such good effect that no one could pass the guard.

Roaring Bill seemed as familiar as his chief with the handcuffs, and Phin Hicks and Center-shot Steve were soon at liberty. Graf passed each a revolver, and instead of one man, there were four to fight.

Mayor Allen, himself, left the bench to take part, but was knocked down by Roaring Bill. Then the outlaws made a forward movement, and literally fought their way through the opposing line.

Neither party seemed desirous of resorting to shooting, and all was in the line of blows. At this work the islanders proved their superiority, and the door was soon reached.

They darted out. Close at hand stood several horses, one of which belonged to the sheriff, and at a word from Graf the bold quartette appropriated the animals.

A moment more and they were riding down the street toward the western hills at full speed.

Even when the fight was going against the sheriff's party, that official had consoled himself with the belief that the outlaws would not succeed in getting out of town, when they had to

run the gantlet of the citizens; but there was a vast difference between horsemen and men on foot.

In a spasm of rage the sheriff caught up a rifle and fired upon them, but without effect. Roaring Bill, Phin and Steve turned and sent back derisive yells, but Graf Giblon did not give the least attention.

"After them! after them!" gasped the marksman.

No one obeyed; no man there felt capable of running down the horses, and the fugitives were fast approaching the hills.

"Pursuit is folly, now," remarked Allen. "Let them go!"

And so all stood and watched in silence, but the rapidity of their flight was not checked until they reached the rocks and ledges of the hills. No horse could proceed far there, and the animals were abandoned. Dismounting, Graf and his companions ascended the ridge without any appearance of haste, and soon disappeared from view. Then the pent-up feelings of the baffled sheriff and his aids found vent; every man there had something to say save Bridle-path and Allen, and after report declared that "the air was made blue."

The mayor checked this demonstration, presently.

"Idle talk will do us no good," he observed. "The question is, do we intend to submit to this outrage, or not? Prisoners have been wrested from legal officers, and the most shameful act committed in our history. Are we going to submit?"

"No!" shouted the sheriff, and a supporting chorus echoed the word.

"Then what are we to do?"

"Go and get the three men, again, and Giblon with them."

"I will head the party!"

The mayor's hearers gave him three cheers.

"Let preparations be made at once. Let the party number ten of our boldest men. If the runaways hide among the recesses of the hills we shall have no easy task to find them, but if they return to the island, we will capture them, sure."

Bridle-path was not so sure of that. He knew the temper of the islanders, and felt sure that, after one move so defiant, they would not submit to be retaken. He had talked with Allen before, however, without making an impression, and was not going to make himself officious, now.

News of the bold rescue spread, and, unlike the trial, itself, had the effect of stopping work in many places. Men and women gathered to discuss the matter, and universally wound up with the statement that they did not see how Graf had done the work single-handed.

Neither did those who had opposed Graf; the whole scene in the court-room was like a troubled dream; they could not understand it.

One thing was clear: it proved that a bold man could do things most remarkable.

Somewhat to his surprise Bridle-path found himself selected as one of the ten who were to accompany Allen. He had the belief that he would be more useful in the future if he did not array himself against the islanders, but a desire to see all that occurred led him to go along.

Unless it came to an actual fight, he could act a passive part.

Thoroughly armed, the party left the town and wound up the ascent like a band of irregular warriors. In due time they came in sight of Lucifer Annex.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MAN WHO KNOWS TOO MUCH.

THE view from Mozambique Point never had been fairer than on that day. A gentle breeze swept the lake, upturning miniature waves which glistened like silver under the touch of the afternoon sun, and the island was a wilderness of green.

None of the outlaws, male or female, met the gaze. The mayor and his party descended the side of the bowl, and, finally, paused near the north landing-place.

"How are we to get over?" Allen asked.

"The gang keep boats, but none are now on this side, as far as I can see. I can just discern them on the opposite shore, under the cover of the bushes. How are we to cross?"

No one had a ready plan, for nobody wanted to swim, and they stood around and discussed the situation for some time. The swimming project, when considered, had to be abandoned, for three of the party knew nothing of the art, and all finally agreed upon one plan. It was known that the islanders had at least one boat capable of conveying a dozen persons. This they must have, or remain where they were.

A bold miner named Powers was selected to swim over, get the craft, and take it back. He started, and the others watched while he went rapidly along.

Bridle-path had entered a warning against this mission, fearing that Powers would be fired upon, but as the swimmer neared land it became evident that such was not to be the case. He reached and disappeared under the overhanging bushes.

"All is well, I reckon," observed the sheriff,

with a sigh of relief. "We'll have the boat directly."

The prophecy was not fulfilled. The boat did not appear, nor did the messenger. One, five, ten minutes passed. Those who waited began to wonder. Another ten minutes and they became anxious. That something disastrous had happened was generally believed, though the more hopeful advanced the idea that a watch might be on the boats, so the messenger could not secure one just then.

At the end of another ten minutes this hope was abandoned; all agreed that the messenger must have fallen into the hands of the enemy.

Two ideas, only, remained to the posse. Some of them advocated the building of a raft from driftwood on the shore, while the sheriff insisted that he would take one man as a companion and himself swim over. He was so persistent in this resolution that it was agreed to let him have his way.

He was about to quit the land when a shout sounded from the island. They looked across and saw a single figure in a break in the bushes.

"Graf Giblon!" Allen exclaimed.

"Stay where you be!" snouted the outlaw.

"Send a boat over!" Allen replied.

"We'll send lead, ef anything."

"Where is Roaring Bill Blood?"

"He's hyer, an' he'll stay hyer. Same as ter your own man. Now, you may as wal give up schemin' how ter git over, fer ef you had a way, every one o' you would be shot dead afore you could git hyer. You ain't in your lousy old court-room now, an' don't you think you kin lord it over us."

"Do you mean to offer us violence?"

"Can't say as ter *voylence*, but we'll shoot any man who tries to come over!"

"This island belongs to Glory Eden—"

"No, it don't; it b'longs ter us. We cast off all allegiance ter your one-hoss burgh long ago, an' the time has come fer you ter know it."

"We demand the surrender of our prisoners."

"Ef you want them come and get them."

"We intend to."

"Come right along, an' them who don't git buried on land will sleep wal in the water."

"Giblon, you surely don't intend to resist?"

"How many more times must I say it? Do you think you own our souls? You've always lorded it over us, an' we wa'n't good enough ter set foot in Glory Eden only when we had money ter leave fer yer goods; an' we was insulted an sneered at on the streets. Yes, we were dogs in yer sight, but the dogs are goin' ter hev their day now. It's war between us an' you. Do you hear?—war! This island is our home, an' we'll fight ter the last gasp in defendin' it. We are armed to the teeth, an' know how ter use the weapons we hev. Ef you try to cross the channel you are dead men. This holds good forevermore. Keep off, or die!"

There was no reason why they should again inquire if Graf Giblon was in earnest; the impetuous, bitter speech was full of sincerity, and they knew there was, indeed, war between the islanders and themselves.

The audacity of the weaker party would have been surprising to the over-confident stronger force had it not been clear that, if so inclined, all of the islanders could retreat to the mountains at short notice.

Their property on the island was worth next to nothing.

Allen's men conferred, and then reopened conversation.

"Have you seen one of our men over there?"

"Powers came ter steal a boat," Graf coolly returned, "an' is now our pris'ner. What of it?"

"We demand his surrender to us!"

"What we find, we keep. Ef he hadn't come prowlin', round hyer all would 'a' been wal; he came, an' now he must take his medicine. You may as wal hush up an' go away, fer I'm done talkin'."

"Giblon, do you know you are defying officers of law, and making yourself liable to severe penalties?"

"I don't keer a rap fer you, yer laws ner yer officers. My law is my own will; my officer, my rifle. As fer us as a people, we're out fer fight. Ef any live men over your side want ter die, let 'em try ter cross the channel. This ain't no bluff; I swear we'll do as I say!"

The outlaw waved his hand, turned and disappeared from view. He left his enemies perplexed and at fault. The boldest there did not aspire to swim the channel, and there was no other way to get at them, at present. It was veritably a state of war, and life must not be wasted.

"What are we to do?" Allen asked, helplessly.

The matter was discussed in all its bearings, and resulted in the decision that attack during the day was not to be thought of; they would wait until night, and then move on the enemy's position in force.

"And it'll be no child's play!" the mayor declared. "We have endured all we can from those people. The island has been an eye-sore for years, and this gathering of outlaws has been permitted to remain when our better judgment told us they ought to be rooted out. Now,

it shall be done. Not only will we have Giblon, Blood, Hicks and Steve for prisoners, but the remainder of the gang must leave our territory, at once and forever!"

This assertion met with general approval, and, after stationing two sentinels to watch the progress on the island, the discomfited party went back to Glory Eden in a frame of mind far from happy.

No one but Bridle-path seemed to realize the gravity of the situation, but he strongly suspected that there would be severe and prolonged fighting before the reckless, well-armed islanders were disposed of.

Clearly, Graf's plot, whatever it was, would not be carried out; it was one which required secrecy, and the break made by Roaring Bill and his boon companions had upset all elaborate calculations.

Bridle path determined not to have anything to do with the campaign of the night, and he withdrew himself quietly from the party to give full scope to those who deserved the lead and the glory.

The mayor and his followers were in consternation the rest of the afternoon, but what plans they formed were known only to the leaders.

It was nine o'clock when a selected party, which did not include Bridle-path, because Bridle-path was not to be found, left the town and went toward Lucifer Annex. It was understood that an attack was to be made, but the majority of those who remained behind regarded the matter as too trivial for serious thought.

It was only the arrest of a tong.

That meant more to Glory Eden than its people suspected.

In the earlier part of the evening Wesley Charles Eastman was sitting in his room, placidly smoking. Mr. Eastman had become a model citizen since his break in regard to the half-breed girl. That affair had taught him that he must use the greatest caution if he was going to win Estella Curtis, and he managed to keep his predilection for mischief under control.

When going to and from the Free School he walked with the same abnormally prim manner that characterizes a young lady of devout mind on Sunday, and the old ladies of Glory Eden, with the acumen common to them, had decided that he was a model young man.

They did not know of the newspaper clipping relative to the ex-convict in Sing Sing.

There was a knock at the door, and Wesley, without rising, bade the applicant enter.

Manfred appeared.

Since coming to the town Wesley had made the acquaintance of the Cuban, among others, but their association never had gone as far as intimacy. The former was not sorry to see the caller, and Manfred received a courteous invitation to sit down.

"I hear that a war-party is going against Lucifer Annex," remarked Wesley, anon.

"Yes."

"That gang should be cleared out."

"Why?"

"Because they are a disgrace."

"Don't you think they have a right to live?"

"Certainly; I could not wish it otherwise but they are not desirable neighbors."

"Perhaps they think the same of people here."

"There always is war between the just and the unjust."

"And between the lowly and the arrogant. Allen and his heelers think they own the whole of creation, and that the humble islanders have no right to breathe."

"Surely, you don't sympathize with the Giblon gang?" Eastman asked, in surprise.

"I do," Manfred returned, stoutly, "and I hope they will protect their rights."

"But I am told they are all ex-outlaws."

"What of it? What is that to Glory F? Practically, Lucifer Annex is a separate I hold that we have no right to meddle w. Roaring Bill made a break, I admit, bu offense is magnified, simply because he from the island. The matter is now persecutio."

"My young friend," said Eastman, unctuously, "you mean well, but I am afraid you are very much in error. This is a contest between the righteous and the unrighteous, and there is only one stand for law-abiding men to take."

Manfred laughed lightly.

"I am glad to see you have such principles! May I ask you one question?"

"Certainly."

"Were you actuated by such lofty principles when you secured your position at the Fr School?"

"Sir?"

"Plainly, Mr. Eastman," pursued Manfred, and his manner was grave and impressive, "I chanced to overhear a short conversation between you and Charles Curtis which has given me much light. I know that you obtained your hold by means of threats on your part and fear on his."

Wesley Charles glared angrily at the speaker.

"What do you mean by such an infamous suggestion?"

"I refer you to your own words for answer. According to your own statement you can't

here a penniless adventurer, but with a secret which put Curtis in your power. By means of this secret you are now principal of the Free School."

"It is false."

"Then you lied when you admitted the truth to Curtis."

"I'd like to know what you mean by all this, sir."

Manfred assumed a negligent air and replied: "I want a share of the plunder!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A REVOLVER BRAVO ENTERS.

EASTMAN frowned severely.

"So you are a blackmailer!" he exclaimed.

"That's an ugly word," Manfred returned. "Of course it would not apply to your transactions with Curtis."

"I insist that you are wholly in error—"

Manfred made a gesture so expressive of disgust that Wesley did not finish the sentence.

"Anyhow," he amended, "you cannot deny that you are a blackmailer."

"I'll tell you just what I am: I'm the son of Richard Mayo, ex-partner in the Black Bear Mine!"

Again Eastman was surprised.

"What will you claim next?"

"You know Mayo had a daughter; you know she is now"—Manfred watched sharply to see how his words were received—"known as Miss Curtis, but you may be ignorant of the fact that she had a brother. I am he!"

"Ridiculous!"

"But I can prove it."

"You resemble Estella!" quoth Wesley, with sarcasm.

"I admit that I do not, but you will find I am not playing a bluff game."

"What is it you want?"

"As I said, a share of the plunder. I am hard up, financially. I'm going to make a raise, and off of Curtis, but don't object to having a good comrade in crime. You and I can fleece him better together, than separately."

Wesley Charles was beginning to realize the difference between exacting blackmail and being the victim, and he writhed under the lash, figuratively speaking. He considered it severe on him, when he had gained foothold at Curtis's, to be deprived of his advantage.

In a game as delicate as this, he wanted no confederate.

Manfred was there for business, and he did not yield an inch. He met all of Eastman's denials firmly, and persisted in his course until that arch-plotter was literally driven to the wall. He was where he could not persist in defiance, for the Cuban could make his own work a failure.

This point gained, Mrs. Daisy Westcott was introduced.

The latter and Manfred had decided that they could gain their ends the easiest by joining forces with Eastman, and the Cuban's claim was duly made known.

Wesley still looked doubtful.

"How you can be brother to Miss Curtis I don't see," he avowed. "It does not follow that all members of a family look alike, but the difference in this case is remarkable."

"We can prove all we assert," Mrs. Westcott declared.

"Why do you want to prove it?"

"We want our share of the plunder," was the hackneyed reply.

"But Richard Mayo died not worth a dollar."

"Then what is the secret of your hold on Curtis?"

Wesley smiled. Whatever Manfred had over-as-fair said between him and Curtis, he had not awayed clew to the fact, as claimed by the super-The dent, that Mayo had died at Curtis's hands, night! My dear madam, you are wholly at sea. I There no hold upon him that I need hesitate to have the world know. I came here to become super of the Free School, and the secret of my power lies in the recommendations I was able to give. Further than that, I trust my management of the school has been such that no one can cavil."

"Don't act the hypocrite!"

"Really, madam—"

"Do you think me blind?"

"By no means. You have eyes that are sparklers."

"Believe, then, that I have some discernment. You may act the angel, but I can see you are all to devil."

"Madam, you compliment me," asserted Wesley, with a bow. "If I possess the traits you charge against me, it is greatly to my credit that I have succeeded in keeping my evil propensities down through the long years of a career strictly honorable!"

"I wonder if the Evil One—he's our patron saint, you know, Mr. Eastman—is as self-satisfied as you?"

"You shock me, madam!"

"A truce to hypocrisy and nonsense. Do you consent to alliance, or defy us? Shall we go in under your wing to be brooded, or go out on the street and tell our story?"

Wesley Charles's eyes snapped. He saw that this woman was more evil and cunning than Manfred, and would be a bad enemy; he saw he would be obliged to yield, but it aroused his anger and filled him with a desire to serve her as he asserted Mayo had been served, years before.

"What do you want?" he asked, curtly.

"That you should go with us to Curtis and introduce Manfred as Estella's brother."

"You must think me a jay. Don't you suppose Curtis knows his own children?"

"Bah! Estella is not one of them. We suspected it before, and have now heard you tell Curtis so. Don't deny a fact he did not deny. She is Richard Mayo's daughter, and Manfred is her brother. We want you to go to Curtis with us and tell him so."

"As I have no knowledge on the point, it would be a lie, practically, whether true or not. Is that what you want of me?"

"Yes."

"I decline to help you. Don't threaten me, for if I accede to your demands, I may as well throw up the sponge and leave Glory Eden."

There was logic in this reply, but Mrs. Westcott was tenacious—Manfred let her do most of the talking—and the result was a compromise. Eastman agreed to accompany them to Curtis's house, but refused to take any part in the interview.

"This will work just as well for us," Daisy observed, after she and Manfred had left the room to prepare for the journey. "His presence will speak to Curtis as well as words, and scare him into submission."

"Don't bet too much on Eastman," Manfred advised. "I'm afraid he is meditating treachery."

"He dare not throw us down."

"We shall see. As he says, we are endangering his own scheme, and he would be foolish not to kick. Look out for him; that's my advice. He is bold, cunning and unscrupulous, and his blow will be aimed at our backs."

"You seem lukewarm."

"So I am. Were I not so hard up, I would not be cowardly enough to blackmail an old man, but the devil of indolence fetters my limbs and my will; I tag on while you lead the way to crime. Enough! Let us leave well in the muddy waters."

Wesley Charles kept his word and accompanied them, but seeing all his plans threatened, took no pains to conceal his hostility. They reached Curtis's house, and were admitted to his presence.

When they arrived, Estella was seated at an upper window, but was not seen by them. She had lighted no lamp, but sat in darkness, looking out into the night, and thinking—of Eastman. Her life had been calm and happy until he came to town; it was so no longer. It was bad enough to have a man in the school who was so distasteful, but, worse still, since he came Mr. Curtis had been gloomy, nervous and down-hearted.

Much bad Estella speculated as to the hold the stranger had on her supposed father, but only one thing was clear. He was a rascal and a hypocrite.

She did not fail to see the trio when they arrived, and the event gave her fresh uneasiness. She had seen Mrs. Daisy Westcott on the street and had not been favorably impressed; she now felt sure the woman's coming was the harbinger of fresh evil.

She was tempted to go down and interrupt the interview, but hesitated to put herself into the company of such persons; so she remained at the window and tried to interest herself in the scene before her—the twinkling lights and the guardian mountains back of the town.

She had heard that Allen and a posse were going to the island to re-arrest Roaring Bill and his companions, but had given the matter no second thought. It seemed a trivial matter, and Blood and his boon companions were not persons in whom she had interest.

Looking toward the west, however, as she sat there, she saw that the heavy cloud which, a short time before, had been so uniformly black, was now streaked with red. It was an odd circumstance, for the dying rays of the sun had left the highest peak of the mountain long before.

She saw the red increase in extent and brightness, and arrived at a conclusion.

"It's a fire," she thought, "and seems to be near the lake. Probably some one has lighted a beacon."

Not long did her thoughts dwell on this subject; a light in the west seemed a matter too trivial to receive second thought when so much else demanded her attention. The fact that the unwelcome visitors remained, troubled her greatly, and finally led to a conclusion.

Charles Curtis was not the proper man to deal with designing persons, and, reluctant as Estella was to see the trio, and as much as she felt that she was not of heroic mold, she determined to go down and interrupt the interview.

This plan, long meditated upon, was finally put in execution. She rose, and went swiftly down the stairs. The parlor door was closed, but she did not let that daunt her; if she was

not wanted there, as seemed likely, it was not wise to let ceremonious ideas control her.

She calmly opened the door and entered.

The visitors were there with Mr. Curtis.

A quick mental picture Estella made, and it told her a good deal. She saw Mr. Curtis, sad-faced and troubled; she saw Mrs. Westcott, defiant and aggressive; she saw Manfred, languid and almost indifferent; she saw Wesley Charles Eastman standing near the rear of all, scowling, angry and dissatisfied, and she knew just who was the chief mischief-maker there.

She centered her regards on Mrs. Westcott.

And Daisy stared for a moment, and then rose and, in a peculiar voice, made the announcement:

"My dear Estella, allow me to introduce you to your brother!"

The words were pointed enough, but, to Estella, they seemed too audacious to be taken seriously. She gave Mrs. Westcott one cold, scornful glance, and then, ignoring her, addressed Mr. Curtis:

"Father, are you busy?"

"I—I have callers, you see," he faltered.

"When will you be at liberty?"

"Mademoiselle," snapped the unamiable Daisy, "we all understood your position, and that is where we have the advantage of you; you don't know ours. Since you have seen fit to intrude upon us, let me say again, as I vainly said a moment ago: This is your brother!"

She pointed to Manfred, but that young man grew more sulky, while Eastman scowled fiercely. The superintendent saw his power slipping away, and gladly would have taken sides with Curtis, but, just then, was as helpless as the mine-owner himself.

This time Daisy was utterly ignored by Estella.

"Please call at my room, father, when you have leisure," the girl added, as she turned toward the door.

She had no intention of leaving the room so abruptly, after having drawn out one remarkable declaration, but she was woman enough to wish to irritate another woman who was offensive to her.

She expected another move from Mrs. Westcott, and was not disappointed. Daisy sprung up and barred her way, her eyes sparkling with resentment. She was not progressing as she hoped with Curtis, simply because Eastman would not help her, and she had determined to use Estella, herself, as an instrument to gain the desired end.

"I have something to say to you," she announced.

"Pardon me, but I have not the honor of your acquaintance, madam."

"You soon will have."

"Have you applied for a situation in the house?"

Estella's manner was calm; it was almost sweet; but the adventuress flushed deeply. Before then she had served as a servant, but the thrust was not less deep on that account.

"Curb your venom," she answered, angrily, "or it may be the worse for you. I am not one to be insulted with impunity. I am here, not to obey, but to command!"

"What is your command?"

"That you speak more respectfully to one who has the power to work you ill."

"I was aware you were here as an enemy. What do you want?"

The plain question dazed Mrs. Westcott. She had avowed Manfred's relationship in a moment of spite. How could she tell enough to further her ends without betraying so much as to ruin them?

She stood in a state of uncertainty, and neither Manfred nor Eastman volunteered to help her out, but the pause was abruptly, rudely broken.

There was a crashing of glass; the window-sash gave way under an attack from the outside; and then into the room leaped a man through the aperture. He was a bearded, desperate-looking fellow, and in either hand he held a revolver.

CHAPTER XXV.

PILLARS OF FIRE.

WHEN the war-party led against Lucifer Annex by Mayor Allen reached the shore of the lake they halted, and then half of them went southward along the beach. They soon returned accompanied by other men, all joining in the carrying of a burden.

The burden proved to be the sections of a raft which carpenters had made during the day by Allen's orders. The sections were now deposited on the sand, and joined together by means of ropes, it being the wish of the leaders to avoid all sound which would betray their advance.

No hammer had rung on the shore, and none was to ring. They believed the surprise would be complete.

The raft was launched, and the party went upon it. Suitable sweeps had been provided, and the trip to the island was begun. Their expectations of success increased. They had made no noise, and none had been heard from Lucifer Annex. The darkness was deep enough so that

the mainland was hid from the view of one on the island, except as a dark background.

Heading for a point remote from the usual landing, the raft was propelled until it touched solid earth again. Then all landed.

"A complete success," declared the sheriff. "It has taken some labor, but better than loss of life."

"The latter may follow."

"I hope not."

"This profound darkness does not tend to increase one's confidence. Defiant as the island chief was, before, he is liable to dispute our way stoutly, now."

"We have discussed that, already."

"I know, and our men are not the kind to shrink from dangers, imaginary or real."

They resumed their way, and the timber was threaded in the same silent fashion. The shanties of the island people appeared to view.

After a few words more they marched on in a compact body, their arms ready for use, and every man on the alert. The profound silence of the village, and the utter lack of stir there, might have been taken as suspicious had not all arrived at the conclusion that everybody was collected at the north landing to defend the passage.

If so, where were they to find their own comrades?

The first shanty was reached. A light burned dimly within; they looked, but saw no occupant. The second and third were the same.

The sheriff pulled at Allen's sleeve.

"Do you notice that all these rookeries are nearly empty?" he whispered.

"Yes."

"I reckon they're poor enough, but can it be they have absolutely nothing?"

"Or have they skipped?"

"That's what's in my mind."

One point was soon settled. They reached the last of the shanties, but not a human being had been found.

"Beaten, by thunder!" the sheriff declared.

"They've run away, sure enough."

"What's to be done?"

"First of all, we will go through the shanties and see if any things of domestic use are to be found. Whether they have been taken or not will show whether the gang really has deserted its old home."

The search was made, but, plainly, every article which could have value as a thing to be used had been removed, and there was no argument as to the meaning of this.

It was evident to all that the outlaws had stolen a move on them and made good their escape.

Anger and disappointment were in the leaders' minds, but they were slow to act in the case. The difficulty of tracing fugitives at night was so apparent that nobody urged the step.

Finally, the mayor recovered his wits somewhat.

"They may still be on the island," he suggested. "Here! some of you go to the landing and see if any boats are left, and the rest scatter and search among the trees. If you find any one, fall back here and signal, and let the call be the order for a general gathering."

The first part of the plan was promptly obeyed. Those who went to the landing found no boats, however, and no sign of life. No signal rose, either, and, finally, they began to assemble by the shanties, each one reporting lack of success.

"We may as well take our medicine," Allen admitted. "Of course they have crossed to the mountains, and further search must be postponed until to-morrow. Even then it may not be easy; perhaps they have a cave where all can hide, and 'keep house,' and defy us."

"They can't work their mines."

"Not the old ones, but they may have better. Anyhow, we shall have to admit defeat for tonight. Let's go back to Glory Eden!"

He turned as he spoke, but as he did so, a rifle-shot sounded in the timber, and one of the party dropped to the ground. His companions stared at him blankly.

"I'm shot!" he gasped.

Two more shots came from the same quarter, and one of them tipped the mayor's hat over on one side of his head.

"Pursue!" he cried. "The outlaws are still at hand. Catch those fellows, and we'll string them up to the trees!"

The men were not reluctant. One of their number had been shot down in a cowardly way, and it was only by chance that the other shots had been harmless. There was a general rush toward the quarter whence the shots had come, only two men remaining with their wounded comrade.

All expected more firing, but there was profound silence when they entered the timber, nor could they find any one. They even went so far as to search some of the tree-tops, but it was a vain undertaking. When they finally gave it up they were angry and the fact that the fallen man was painfully wounded added to the feeling.

"Let's burn their infernal old rat-traps!" cried one of the posse.

The suggestion was, itself, like a firebrand. They had repeated defeats to irritate them, and

the secret shot was the final load. Nearly all spoke in favor of the use of the torch, and Allen did not hesitate long.

"Go ahead!" he directed.

With a shout the men obeyed. They ran into the shanties and scattered the decaying fires over the floor, and fanned up the blaze where it was slow in starting. In a very few moments a fire was under way in each and every hut, and that meant destruction; the miserable old edifices were dry as they could be, and ruin came with a rush.

The flames burst out; they wrapped walls and roof in their red embrace; and the lurid pillar which reared its head above the island found support from every threshold where Graf Giblon and his followers had resided.

Whatever might come next, that night marked the end of Lucifer Annex, for it was now only a roaring ruin.

The avengers waited until each shanty fell in, and then, carrying their wounded comrade, returned to the raft and paddled across the channel. No further attack was made on them.

As they landed, one of the party looked attentively at the area ahead of them, above the ridge.

"Ain't it odd that the fire should reflect ag'in' the clouds, thar?" he asked.

His companions looked and saw a red pillar mounting up in the Eastern sky.

"Say!" another man exclaimed; "that ain't no reflection; thar's a fire at Glory Eden!"

"Hark! Wa'n't that a rifle-shot?"

Allen grasped the sheriff's arm.

"What if the outlaws have attacked the town?" he cried, in sudden alarm.

The suggestion was enough to spur all into activity, and, leaving the wounded man and those who were carrying him, the others rushed up the ascent, stumbling over the rocks in their haste. The thought that Graf Giblon had cunningly turned the tables upon them by means of a counter-attack was startling, for nearly all of the party had house or family there.

They were almost breathless when they reached the crest of the ridge, but the view brought nothing consoling to them. Instead, they saw ample cause for the red pillar: the whole of Glory Eden was lighted up, and, at first glance, seemed on fire from side to side.

Second glance showed that five or six buildings really were burning, and one of them was the court-house, the pride of the town. At that point men were to be seen vainly fighting the flames, for the edifice was doomed; and elsewhere the scene was even more exciting.

At the north several dwellings were on fire, and a running fight was going on between two forces, one of which was retreating toward the hills in a slow and stubborn way.

The words which fell from the lips of the witnesses to this scene were less coherent than emphatic. There was no longer any doubt that they had been completely outgeneraled by Graf Giblon, and the sight of the burning buildings was one almost maddening.

Forgetting that they were out of breath, they rushed down the slope even more recklessly than they had ascended the opposite side. Rocks and ledges were as nothing to them, and they made leaps which would have alarmed them at any other time.

The town was reached, but they found nothing to do, and no one to fight. The desultory firing at the north had ceased; the burning buildings were doomed, but the picture they had expected of men going about with torches to fire other buildings was not realized.

"What does it mean?" Allen asked, meeting a man of high public position.

"We've been attacked by Graf Giblon's outlaws."

"Is any one killed?"

"Two or three on each side, report says, but the extent of the damage is not yet known. Thousands of dollars have gone up in flames; I know not the exact facts. Only that the work was early discovered, the whole place would now be gone. Such was their plot, no doubt, but thank Heaven! the actual result might be worse. Most of our town remains intact, and we still live."

"Yes," cried the mayor, "and live for vengeance!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

LEFT TO THE FLAMES.

THE intrusion of the desperado who had first broken the window in Curtis's parlor and then sprung in, himself, was as startling as it was novel and unceremonious, and as he stood there, a bulky thing of rags, dirt and branded villainy, those before him gazed in silence. His face, never handsome, was smeared with fresh blood from a cut on his temple, and any one could be excused for losing presence of mind at such a spectacle.

But the half had not been seen.

Another figure followed the first, after a pause, and two others came after the second, but while the latest comers were faithful copies of the red-browed ruffian, the second of the invaders was a girl in scarlet.

It was Cythia, bright, dashing and cool.

She kept silence for a brief space of time, but soon spoke to the point.

"Upon my word, I am surprised to find a family love-feast, but I reckon we know how to manage greater odds than these. Cover them, men!"

"Correck!" croaked he of the red brow, as he flourished his revolvers and then took aim.

His fellow ruffians followed his example with less of empty show.

"You are my prisoners!" added Cythia.

"What means this intrusion?" Curtis found words to demand.

"It means that Glory Eden's race is run."

"I am talking about your lawless conduct."

"Never mind the Dictionary, old gentleman; I know what you mean. You, and all here, are my prisoners. Don't dare to draw a weapon, or I shall order my heroes to fire. Come forward, one at a time, and be tied up!"

"Woman, do you know—"

"More than you can tell, sir; that's what I know. Come! this is no time for idle words. Are you going to obey me? Observe that you are all well covered."

She pointed to her followers, and her manner was as imperious as if she were queen of Glory Eden and its people.

Curtis was not satisfied to yield. He was not a man naturally brave, but, being a citizen of a law-abiding town, he resented the uncere-monious intrusion, and correspondingly uncer-mious demand.

He remonstrated and threatened, but Cythia was like a whirlwind. She did not at any time grow coarse, and her way of handling the case was calculated to make one wish she were engaged in a better cause.

When she again made her demand Manfred surprised every one by going forward and offering himself as the first captive, whereupon his hands were bound.

Eastman did not like the situation, but, having some knowledge of what six revolvers in the hands of Western experts could do, he accepted the situation and made the second victim.

Curtis was left as the only man to oppose them, and his courage failed. He, too, was bound.

Thus far the boldness of the outrage had created a dazed feeling among all the victims, but Cythia did not for a moment lose sight of the practical side of the case. She had come there with a purpose, and it did not waver.

When the masculine members of the first party had been disposed of, she turned to her right hand man, nodded sharply, and then went to the window and stood looking out.

The red-browed man took Curtis by the arm.

"Toddle along with us!" he directed.

"Where?" the mine-owner asked, growing pale.

"Where we lead."

"But—"

"Shut up! Boyees, do yer duty!"

He pulled Curtis forward, roughly, and his fellow-outlaws fell into line by seizing Estella and Mrs. Westcott. This was something neither could relish, and resistance followed promptly, but their strength availed nothing against their captors. Daisy proved that her temper still remained, and her nails marked more than one furrow in the face of her enemy, but she had to go where he willed.

When all of the others were out of the house, Cythia turned and regarded Manfred and Eastman.

"It was part of the plan to burn this house," she remarked, in a matter-of-fact way, "but we did not expect to find you here. I have no desire to cremate you, gentlemen, so that part of the programme will be omitted. Good-night!"

"Wait!" exclaimed Manfred, as she turned away.

"Well?"

"Why not cast off my bonds?"

"So you can give the alarm?"

"I promise you I will not."

"Be content with what you have. If I leave you free from all injury, take your luck and thank fortune it's no worse."

Again she turned toward the door, whereupon Eastman broke a long silence on his part by cheerfully exclaiming:

"Farewell, sunshine of my soul!"

Cythia flashed a backward glance.

"The devil smiles when his children talk!" she retorted, and disappeared.

Manfred and Eastman looked at each other wonderingly.

"What wizard-work is this?"

"You'll have to ask the girl in scarlet."

"It knocks out our scheme."

"Sure!"

"You don't seem much exasperated."

"Why should I kick?"

The Cuban was silent for a few moments, evidently thinking deeply, but Wesley Charles aroused him by exclaiming:

"I believe that devil has played us false!"

"What do you mean?"

"Use your nose and ears. I think I can smell smoke and hear the crackling of flames. The house is on fire!"

Manfred's thoughts turned quickly to the present; he, too, heard the ominous crackling. "I wouldn't have believed it!" he muttered. "Can't you get out of your bonds?" "They are cutting almost to the bone." "We've got to get away or be incinerated."

"Follow me!" Manfred slid out of his chair, and, once on the floor, began to roll toward the door with snake-like agility. It was a mode of locomotion which Eastman did not feel like imitating successfully, but he saw no other. He slid to the floor, growled at the shock he received, and then began to roll after the Cuban—a mode of progress he found anything but satisfactory at his age.

Manfred had managed to open the imperfectly-closed parlor door, but Eastman found him kicking viciously at that which led to the street without producing perceptible effect, while smoke floated around them so thickly that breathing was difficult, and flames were curling around the woodwork not far away.

"Make haste, or we are dead men!" urged Eastman, who, although he had gone through many startling scenes in the past, was really frightened.

The Cuban was far calmer, but principally because, with his peculiar nature, he did not value life so highly.

"What difference will it make a hundred years from now?" he returned.

"The differences comes in this hour—now!"

"Keep back, and give me room. I must manage to rise, in order to get at the door-knob."

He was endeavoring to do this when the door was dashed open suddenly and a man sprung inside. He did not pause for a moment, but, failing to see the prostrate men in the cloud of smoke, hurried to the interior of the building. Neither Manfred nor Eastman had recognized him, but they did not care who he was; he had left the outer door open, and that was more to them than anything else.

They made haste to roll out, and went bouncing down the steps at the expense of fresh pain. Once on the sidewalk their lives were safe, it seemed, but they were led to wonder more than ever why no help had come.

Wonder on this point soon ceased. When Manfred gained position so that he could use his eyes more freely, a glare of light burst upon him, and he saw that the cherished court-house was in flames and burning fiercely. More than that, the shouts of men were mingled with the reports of rifles and revolvers.

"There is a riot!" he exclaimed.

"More likely, Graf Giblon's devils have attacked the town!"

"I believe you're right."

"Ha! ha! And our war-party has gone against Lucifer Annex! Won't somebody be howling when they find how Graf has seen their bet, and gone them a rich stake better?"

It was hardly proper for the superintendent of the Free School to exult over such a misfortune, but his sense of humor was so strong he could not help it. Graf's cunning, tragic as it might prove, and the downfall of the mayor and his plans, seemed highly amusing to Wesley Charles.

The man who had passed them at the door was finding nothing humorous about the situation. His courage was established by the fact that he had not been appalled by the sight when he entered, but he was finding little to reward him for the risk.

He had gone to the upper floor at once, and was seeking from room to room, but under vast difficulties: the smoke and fire alike assailed vision and respiration, and he knew not at what moment he might succumb. If he could have searched rapidly the work would have been short, but the pall of smoke might hide some one who had fallen unconscious.

Knowing this he groped in the cloud that almost overwhelmed him, feeling his way until the last room had been gone through.

"Thank Providence!" he cried.

He turned to leave the house, but violently collided with another person, and would have fallen if a strong hand had not grasped his arm.

"Strawberry Sam!" he uttered, thickly.

"Ay, it's me, Bridle-path! Whar you go Strawberry Sam generally is found. Don't think you kin die hyer, fer I won't allow fire, nor flood, nor man ter get ahead o' me in my vengeance! D'y'e understand?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A STRONG, STRANGE BOND.

BRIDLE PATH did not understand, fully. Only great strength and equal determination had enabled him to endure the smoke of the burning house, and, as it was, he was dazed and almost overcome. He had only two clear ideas in his mind—the Curtis family had escaped, and he must speedily get to the outer air or perish.

If Strawberry Sam had seen fit to assail him then he would have found an easy victim, but such was not the branded miner's purpose.

He was eager to save his companion, even if not from any good motive, and he kept that firm hold on Bridle-path's arm and guided him from the doomed house.

Once outside the surveyor stood breathing the pure air in grateful silence. They were alone near the house; Manfred and Eastman had disappeared. There was nothing strange in this; the minner had released them before he entered.

Bridle-path's mind cleared, and he became filled with gratitude to Strawberry Sam for helping him at such a critical moment. He turned to express his thanks, but encountered a look so strange that the words died away on his lips.

"Mebbe you want ter go in ag'in?"

"To go in?" echoed the young man, blankly.

"Yes."

"Why should I?"

"You went in afore ter commit suicide!"

"Nonsense!"

"You can't fool me; et's yer wish ter get red o' me, but you can't do it. You've got ter live until I get ready ter settle with you, which will be when I get more proof."

"You think I had rather kill myself than face you, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then you are away off your horizontal. I am not aware, Mr. Sam, that I have any fear of you. Even if I had taken on a panic, I should prefer running away to suicide."

"Yes, but I'd overtake yer."

"Samuel, you over-estimate your prowess, I think. If I ever see fit to run away, you can wager your last doubloon that you won't catch me. You may be a good racer, but there are men equally as good."

"You talk wal."

Bridle-path stretched one arm out toward the blazing house in a dramatic way.

"Do you suppose, even if I were bent on suicide, I would seek oblivion in that purgatory of flames?—that I would court the worst of deaths? Sam, you are in error, and I ask you to mark one fact down: I am not afraid of you!"

Bridle-path was fully himself again, and the keen, bold gaze he bent upon the miner caused the latter's own eyes to waver and fall.

"Then why was you thar?" he stammered.

"To save life. Where is Curtis? where his family?"

"I don't know."

"They are not in that sheet of flame; thank Heaven for that. But, Sam, we lose valuable time here. The outlaws of Lucifer Annex have attacked the town; half a dozen buildings are in flames, and there is fighting going on. Listen! That was the report of a rifle, and the target was no thing of wood and stone. We are wanted on the side of justice; follow me, and prove yourself an honest man!"

"Lead on!"

Side by side they ran toward the north. The man with the birthmark had forgotten his vendetta for the time, and the prospect of fighting made his blood leap in quick sympathy. He might have been rallied to fight for any cause, then, and would have made a good, though machine-like ally.

Bridle-path was disturbed by no delusions, nor did he shrink from his companion. He told the truth when he assured Sam that he did not fear him. The man was as dangerous as a panther, for some freak might cause him to strike from the rear, but Bridle-path was not made of weak material.

When they reached the northern side of the town the fight was still in progress. It was a desultory struggle. Giblon's men were not there in force, and most of the citizens of Glory Eden were trying to save the buildings already fired, unconscious that the evil-doers of the night were still present and bent on further mischief.

It was their effort to hold place in the town and spread the fire, and that of a few men to drive them away, that caused the fighting.

Bridle-path had no hesitation as to his own conduct. There was only one side of law and justice, and the island-men had proved themselves unworthy of the aid of any honest person.

Both he and Strawberry Sam were without rifles, but their revolvers were ready for use. At the surveyor's suggestion they moved upon the flank of the outlaws' position, or where it was supposed to be, but found it hard to ascertain the exact state of affairs. No buildings were burning at that point—the incendiaries being too closely pressed to continue their work—and the dark shadows left abundant cover for many men.

"We shall have to creep up on them," Bridle-path suggested.

"Be car'ful o' yer life!"

"Oh! are you anxious for me?"

"Your life belongs ter me!" Sam hoarsely asserted.

"My friend, you are the most cheerful man I ever met as a companion. Existence can never be dull with you around. Still, I am not so fascinated with you that I shall return your advice; risk your life all you see fit. Come!"

They again moved forward, and Bridle-path showed rare acquaintance with the strategic movements of the Western scout. He was like a soft-footed panther, and, without Sam as an incubus, would have given a good account of himself, but the miner was clumsy to a degree which offset all skill.

Bridle-path paused in the shelter of a cabin.

"We must charge, or act the traditional fifth wheel of the carriage," he observed bluntly. "I can take you no further. If your ungainly frame is carried on by your legs, in a parody on stealth, we shall both get a charge of lead in our hold."

Strawberry Sam waved his revolver.

"Le's charge! I want ter git at somebody; I want ter fight!"

"Ajax, you are a trump! We will charge, and when the run is over, there may be no odds to even up between us. Come on!"

The start was not made. There was a rustling sound behind them, and Bridle-path wheeled quickly. A warning cry escaped his lips, but, before he could get in position for defense, a heavy blow dashed him against the shanty. Then he saw a knife raised over him, and, the miner having been struck down, the quartette of outlaws who had appeared so suddenly menaced the young man in a body.

He was not a passive victim.

He dodged the blow of the knife, and retaliated with a stroke from the shoulder which piled the aggressor on top of Sam. Then he bared his bowie and faced those who remained, cool and firm.

Knife crossed knife and a desperate fight seemed certain, for Bridle-path was a master in the use of the far-famed knife, but a new diversion came with the abruptness which had marked each stage of the encounter.

A revolver began to crack, and the outlaws, as if moved by the impulse of one mind, turned and fled toward the rocks back of the shanties. A slight figure came around the corner, revealing Manfred, quiet and nonchalant.

"I have no reason to be proud of my aim," he remarked, indifferently, "but I'll swear that those fellows carried off more lead than their cartridges hold!"

He began to reload his revolver in his peculiar, deliberate way.

"Young man, I owe you a life," Bridle-path affirmed, heartily.

"I don't know as to that, for you seemed holding them at bay like an expert, but I feared some knave would get a slash at you when you were off guard. But what of our fallen giant? I owe him a good turn this night, and trust he is not killed."

"I think Ajax remains in this world of trouble."

Manfred had knelt by Strawberry Sam, but it needed the surveyor's practiced eye to discover that the man-hunter was only stunned.

"I'm glad of that," continued the Cuban. "He did me a great favor over by Charles Curtis's house."

"Do you know where Curtis is?"

"I don't know where they took him."

"Took him? Who? What do you mean?"

"The island angel in scarlet, Cythia, has gobbed him, Estella and Mrs. Westcott."

"What! taken them prisoners?"

"Yes."

Manfred did not exhibit any great amount of interest in the fortunes or misfortunes of the Curtis family, but Bridle-path's face bore a look of deep concern.

"Do you say you don't know where they were taken?"

"I don't know."

"And that Cythia led the abductors?"

"Yes."

"What can be her object?"

"I'll hazard a guess. The angel in scarlet did not confide in me, and I can't give any proof, but I suspect she is jealous of Estella. Fact is, my dear sir, a man can't marry more than one woman, legally, however many he may woo, and I fear Cythia thinks she will be the one to get the slump. A woman like her don't fly to courts of law or poison for relief; she plays high cards for victory, first, and then, if beaten, resorts to knife or revolver, but don't use them on herself—oh, no!"

Bridle-path did not hear these philosophical comments; his mind was all upon Estella, and the same motives that had led him to the burning house now urged him on to attempt her rescue.

He aroused and asked for particulars, which Manfred gave fully, only vailing his visit to Curtis by asserting that it was one of no importance, and a mere call. When the story was told, Bridle-path realized how serious the situation was. Unless the kidnappers had been checked by some of the citizens, enough time had elapsed for them to make good their escape.

Plainly, it would be useless to take the trail that night.

Strawberry Sam now sat up and looked about in a dazed way, whereupon Manfred gave him a flask of whisky. To this the miner gave due attention. After a long drink he asked:

"What's happened?"

"You've had your desire for a fight gratified," dryly responded Bridle-path.

The latter had been watching the scene in the town, and had arrived at two conclusions: first, that the outlaws' attack was fully over, and, secondly, that the fires would not spread beyond the building already doomed.

Followed by Strawberry Sam and Manfred, he now went toward the court-house, and arrived

Strawberry Sam.

just as Mayor Allen's party reached the spot after their mad descent of the ridge. There had been angry men seen in Glory Eden before that night, but never any, report said, who had expressed themselves quite so forcibly as did the mayor and the sheriff.

They had been completely outwitted by Graf Giblon, and, making no mention of private loss, the public heart had been stricken in the loss of the court-house.

"Who will follow me in pursuit?" Allen demanded.

There was a promising chorus, but one grizzled old man inquired:

"Whar'll you go?"

"Where they have gone."

"My advice is, don't! Et's sure bettin' that the outlaws is in ambush, som'ers, longingly waitin' fer you."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WAR-PARTY MOVES.

THIS practical suggestion was not lost upon those who heard it. The men of Lucifer Annex had broken loose wholly, and the work already done that night was proof that they would hesitate at nothing, and, certainly, they would not add greatly to the opprobrium already resting upon them by taking the step suggested.

The idea of walking into an ambush, where the enemy would have all the advantage, chilled the ardor of the most zealous of the would-be pursuers.

"But it will be unmanly not to pursue," remarked Allen.

"Let me suggest a compromise," interrupted Bridle-path, modestly. "This is a case where four or five experienced scouts possibly may do more good than an army."

The mayor caught at the idea, and chose Bridle-path as the first. When fully selected the surveyor was given full charge of them, and asked to give them orders. This he did by directing that each man go alone, silent and watchful, and seek to make discoveries while himself remaining unseen.

All agreed to this; the scouts separated and started.

Bridle-path had gone only a few yards when he heard some one behind him, and, turning, saw Strawberry Sam following like a dog.

"What do you want?" the young man demanded, sharply.

"I'm goin' with you."

"You are? Not if know it!"

"But I don't want ter lose sight o' you."

"Why not?"

The miner touched the birthmark on his arm.

"You know why."

"And you know that this is a private expedition."

"Yes, but I won't do any harm, an' I don't want ter lose sight of you."

"Samuel, like ghosts I am not always to be seen. This is an occasion of that kind. I would as soon take a cow with me, for she would not be more clumsy. In a word, you can't go. Turn back!"

Bridle-path's manner had suddenly grown imperative, and he pointed commandingly toward the town as he spoke. Sam looked like a sulky child.

"But I want ter be near ye. S'pose them outlaws should attack you in a body? I want you ter live until I find out fer sure ef you're the man I'm buntin' fer."

"Ajax, your solicitude for my welfare is equaled only by your frankness, but neither has an element to enlist my sympathy. You can't go with me. Turn back!"

"You'll come 'round ag'in?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll do as you say."

The miner turned and slouched away. He did not once look back, and the houses of Glory Eden soon hid him from Bridle-path's view. The latter hesitated before resuming his own way.

"A pleasant shadow to have, I'll swear! He is not deranged, I think, but ideas and methods are so warped up in his cranium that it's a pity he don't live in some world all by himself. As my follower he is a success only in his own mind, but may prove more so in the future. A dangerous man! He may yet take a notion to strike me in the back. Something must be done!"

Slowly the speaker raised his grounded rifle, then, with a grave shake of his head, he resumed his way.

He was not sanguine of making discoveries, but he went about the work earnestly and skillfully. As a scout he had abilities of no mean order, and he put them into effect.

He had no clew to their ultimate destination, or to the course they naturally would take, but one thing was certain, they were done with the island. After that night's work they would be hunted criminals, and, even if all the shanties on the island were not in ruins, it would be no safe dwelling-place.

Plainly, they would seek a refuge in the wilder part of the mountains; a place no doubt long since selected by Graf Giblon. If he had used his usual cunning, it would be hard to find, un-

less the marauders were overtaken and followed to their lair.

Bridle-path pressed on, his senses of sight and hearing always on the alert, but his endeavors were not rewarded. He went far from Glory Eden, but saw no human being.

The night was waning when he abandoned the search and turned back. He would have passed the night in the mountains, but had more faith in the plan of taking up the trail at the town, at daybreak.

When he reached Glory Eden, again, he found the other scouts there ahead of him, but all had the same report to make: no discoveries had been made. It was clear that the outlaws had retreated rapidly.

The leaders of the town had been in more systematic consultation, and the result was that every possible effort was to be put forth to avenge the wrongs of the night. Several buildings lay in ruins, and Charles G. Curtis and Estella had been carried away in captivity—no one mentioned Mrs. Daisy Westcott, or seemed to care for her.

Bridle-path promised to join the rescue-party, and then hastened to the hotel to get a little sleep. He was on the piazza when he heard a footstep behind him. Turning suddenly he encountered Strawberry Sam.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked, sharply.

"I seen you was back," the miner replied, "an' come ter you."

"Were you invited?"

"No, but—"

"What do you want?"

"Jes' let me sleep in your room so I kin'watch you—"

Bridle-path grasped Sam's shoulder and swung him around with an exhibition of strength which surprised the athletic miner.

"You champion crank!" the young man exclaimed, "what will you ask next? What power moves that muddled head of yours? Let you sleep in my room! No, sir!"

"But—"

"I won't listen to any argument. I have humored your whims long enough, and will endure them no longer. You are on the wrong track when you mistake me for Richard Mayo, and your only ground for suspicion is the instigation of one who is my personal enemy. You have no proof; you never can get any. I am not Richard. Such being the case, I won't submit to your notions. Go home!"

Strawberry Sam stood with clinched hands, breathing hard and staring at Bridle-path.

Whether he fully understood what was said was uncertain.

"So you want ter git rid o' me," he answered, slowly.

"I do, and I'm going to."

"S'posen I won't go?"

"There is no 'suppose' about it. You will go, simply because I won't have you here. You can see the street, yonder. Go!"

Roughly he pushed Sam away.

"But—"

"No words! Go!"

Sam was shoved to the head of the stairs, and then, as he still hesitated, hustled down and out to the street.

"There you are!" Bridle-path added. "Now, get away!"

"Be you my master?"

"I am my own master, and I won't have you around. Don't glare at me, man, for I feel no fear of you. More than that, I warn you not to annoy me further, and prevent me from obtaining what little sleep the waning night will allow. Go!"

He gave the miner another push, and then turned and walked calmly up the stairs. He half-expected Sam to draw a revolver upon him, but he remained standing in the street like a post. Bridle-path went to his room, closed and fastened the window, and drew down the curtain.

His way of ending the interview had not been the result of temper, but he was tired of humorizing the man with the birthmark. Strawberry Sam had become a nuisance, and it was time to resort to vigorous measures. The plan of violent manner and authoritative speech had been tried as an experiment, and thus far, it had worked well.

Few men would have cared to go to sleep with only a frail window between themselves and an enemy who had sworn to kill, but Bridle-path relied on the fact that Sam could not break the glass without considerable noise, and he had seen danger before that night.

He lay down and soon fell asleep.

Day had dawned when he awoke.

Rising quickly, he went to the window, raised the curtain and looked out to see if the rest of Glory Eden was astir. The first thing he saw was a man on the piazza, curled up like a dog in sound slumber, his garments touching the window-sill.

It was Strawberry Sam!

Strongly affected by the miner's persistence, Bridle-path remained gazing at him for several minutes.

"Incomprehensible man!" he finally murmured; "your devotion to one idea, undirected by a high order of intelligence, partakes strongly of

the instinctive vendetta of a dumb animal, but it is fixed and changeless as the eternal peaks of yonder mountains. I pity Richard Knox if ever you get your hand on him. As for myself I had rather be known as Bridle-path, than by any other name."

Turning away he went down to breakfast, and then sought the rendezvous from which Allen was to start the war-party.

Everything possible had been done to make the search systematic. It was already known that Graf Giblon's band had not returned to the island, and that only the decaying embers remained to mark their settlement of former days. Plainly, the theory that they had taken to some retreat in the mountains was correct, and to that place the leaders purposed tracking them by means of experienced scouts, with the main body of avengers following after.

Bridle-path was wanted as one of the scouts, but he asked leave to act independent of every one else, and the request was granted.

The surveyor saw Wesley Charles Eastman among the avengers, and, before long, caught sight of Strawberry Sam secretly watching his intended prey.

Well aware that the modern Ajax would ruin all the delicate work he might wish to do, Bridle-path resolved to foil him. Sauntering to the extremity of the crowd, he passed into a building by one door, left it by another and at once left the town.

When Sam again looked for the surveyor he was not to be found.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE WAYS OF WOMEN CLASH.

WELL up on the mountain-side, and in one of the rockiest parts of the range near Glory Eden, was a spot where, in the dim ages of the past, the solid rock which formed a ridge two hundred yards wide, and one-third as high, seemed to have been cleanly cut by some power, and the two halves moved a hundred yards apart.

What had originally been the condition of the earth in this gap no one could say, but it was now a field of green which rivaled the meadow of a well-cultivated farm.

On the southern and northern sides rose the unripen rocks in sheer precipices, and it would have been a bold climber who would seek to scale them, for the visible indentations which would afford hold for hand or foot were but few.

Each summit was well wooded, despite the lower foundation of rock, and the thick line of trees of all sizes, both shapely and scraggly, which partially overhung the cliffs, was in each case like a wild, untrimmed and ragged hedge.

On the day that the war-party left Glory Eden men and women were to be seen on this natural meadow between the cliffs, and it needed only one glance to reveal Graf Giblon's band, as far intact as the fight at the town had left it.

It was not a demoralized-looking party, barring a few who were wounded, and it was clear that the change of base had been successfully made.

On a suitable point of the ridge, above, a lookout had been established, and from this point Graf had been watching Glory Eden through a telescope. He came down by means of a detour, and was at once surrounded by his men.

"What news?" was the question.

"They have started."

"You ain't seen them git hyer, yet, hev ye?"

"No, an' what's more, they won't. Don't be in the least uneasy."

Graf spoke confidently, and there was reason for his position. When the ex-islanders came to the new home, one party from Lucifer Annex and the other from the town, it had been by means of routes carefully considered before, and they did not believe the trail could be followed. Even if it was, Nature had so situated the new camp that it was almost inaccessible, and, if found, the well-armed adventurers were there, amply provisioned and resolute, to defend it.

The men kept Graf for some time, and when he left them he had gone only a few yards when he was again accosted, this time by a woman.

It was Mrs. Westcott.

"I beg your pardon, Captain Giblon," she began, sweetly, "but may I speak with you?"

The grim leader grounded his rifle and looked at her with stony indifference.

"Wal?" he questioned.

"I wish to thank you for the courtesy thus far shown me, a prisoner."

Graf's lip curled scornfully.

"Wal?"

"It is very kind of you—"

"Wal?"

"Excuse me, but why do you repeat that word so persistently."

"You hev got an ax ter grind," quoth Graf, bluntly. "Go ahead! Don't spin polysyllables an' synonimble in empty words, but spout yer verses like a man. I hate a woman who thinks she's cunnin', fer she can't never come ter the p'int!"

Even Daisy was discomfited by this plain speech, but she did "have an ax to grind," and would not let any rudeness prevent her from being heard.

"You are right in one sense, captain," she admitted, "and I will raise myself above censure by straightforward speech. I am not pleasantly situated here. I am a prisoner, and the other prisoners are my enemies."

"What's that ter me?"

"Aren't you leader here?"

"I reckon so."

"That's why I come to you. I was captured with the Curtis tribe, and have to endure whatever odium attaches to them, yet I am the victim of circumstances. I hate and despise them."

"What of it?"

"I request to be separated from them. I am willing to do all I can for you; test me as you will. There is war between you and Glory Eden. Can I help you? If so, you have only to name the favor."

For the first time Graf smiled, but it was with grim irony and sarcasm.

"It's nat'ral fer you ter want ter further yer own interests; any man or woman would feel that way, an' I hev no blame for you. But I'd like ter ask how you kin help us? Ef thar's any clash up hyeraway, it'll be a right smart rifle duel. How kin you help us?"

"If necessary, by reloading your rifles in a time of battle. Women did it in the old pioneer days—why not now?"

Daisy was making a strong bid and it was not without effect. Graf's sneer vanished, but he shook his head.

"I don't know about them old days, but it's sart'in they had muzzle-loaders, then, an' I reckon a woman o' musk'le would work in handy. But with our breech-loaders, it's different, yer see."

"We will waive that for now, and touch on two other points. Your daughter saw fit to bring prisoners here, a step which excited your anger when you learned of it. I heard you storming against her course. Now, as I said before, old Curtis and his stick of a daughter are my enemies. I stand ready to help you in any scheme you may have, now or in the future. Again, if the pursuers come near, you may want to play strategy against them. My standing is good there; I can, and will, go as a decoy and work any trick or trap you may invent."

"Against yer friends?"

"I have none, there. I am what the dear, kind, amiable world calls an adventuress. I came to Glory Eden, a few days ago, dead broke. I must play my cards for bread, or I won't have any. Such is my position, and you may believe me when I say I would as soon help you as the lordliest man in the land."

Graf ran his gaze over the glib speaker as if he were considering an article of merchandise.

"Wal, we'll see," he replied, more amiably, and turned away.

Mrs. Westcott's eyes sparkled, and she meditated:

"I have hit him up about right, and may yet get revenge and booty. He could do worse than to take me in. If he gives me a show he shall not regret it. I am tired of fighting the world, and tired of men and women who wear snake-hearts under silk and broadcloth. Why not link my fortunes forever with this bold band? They could help me hate the world!"

Graf Giblon went on, but was soon accosted by another woman. It was Cynthia, and she was more resplendent than ever. She looked as neat as if nothing unusual had occurred during the past night; her scarlet dress was there in all its glory; and upon her fingers, and at her throat, and in her ears were diamonds which flashed and glittered.

The outlaw leader was not ready to forgive her for bringing prisoners there, for he knew not what trouble might come upon the band through those prisoners, and he would have passed her with an air of cold severity and in silence, but she was not there merely to look at him.

"What's that woman been saying to you?" she demanded.

"That's my business!" Graf growled.

"It is mine, too."

"Humph! You are carryin' a high hand, gal, an' need disciplin'. You want ter be took down, an' I'm jest ready ter do it. A fortnight on bread an' water will—"

"Don't talk nonsense! That woman is a schemer, a crafty snake, and I know it. I can read her. One woman always can read another."

"Gammon!"

"I wish she was a thousand miles away," declared Cynthia. "I am afraid of her, in a certain sense, just as I would be of a poisonous snake that strikes without warning. My advice is that she be kept in close confinement."

"Wal, that's rich! Ef you're so down on her, why did you bring her hyer?"

"It was an accident. I did not want her, but she was with a prisoner I did want, and the men brought her. I did not remonstrate much, for I thought it would make our stroke at Glory Eden all the more decisive. Now, I wish I had never set eyes on her. Believe me, there is mischief in her. She should be kept closely shut up."

Cynthia spoke earnestly, but it was at an un-

lucky time. She was not so valuable to Graf since the crisis at the town had been precipitated by unlooked-for events, and he could not forgive her for taking prisoners into their secret home.

He aspired to be avenged, and the time had come.

Stubbornly he replied:

"You've had your little pull at the rope, an' now I'll hev mine. 'That woman,' as you call her, is goin' ter hev all the elbow room she wants. She's one o' the few women known ter me who hev any brains, an' she's goin' ter git chance ter use them—"

"Take care she don't use them on men who have none!" Cynthia retorted.

"Meanin' me?"

"Meaning whomever she uses her arts on."

"That's all right; you kin sneer, but I don't turn a hair. You an' me know each other, an' thar ain't no love wasted between us. The woman will have as much swing hyer ez I see fit ter give her. You kin go about yer business; you've turned ag'in' the band, an' put us in jeopardy, an' I want no more o' you!"

Turning abruptly, the outlaw stalked away. Cynthia watched him in disgust.

"Of all the stubborn creatures living, a man is the worst!" she exclaimed, when he was fairly gone. "Men? Bosh! they are children free from control, and no more fit to care for themselves. I don't know one that I would—"

She stopped, meditated, sighed. Then she walked over to a part of the camp where Estella and Mr. Curtis were seated near the northern cliff.

It was not a mistake to give the prisoners the freedom of the camp, itself, for, unless allowed to pass the guards, they could not escape. Near the point Cynthia now sought was the night-quarters of the band—a cavity at the end of the northern cliff. It was, in part, a natural cave, but for several weeks Graf and a few picked men had been at work enlarging it by excavating the earth which adjoined it. The result was a capacious, dry and comfortable retreat.

Both Mr. Curtis and Estella looked weary and troubled. No satisfaction had been given them when they asked questions, and they were wholly at loss to know what the future had in store for them.

Cynthia called Estella aside.

"How do you like the new home?" she asked, abruptly.

"I don't like it," was the frank answer.

"Yet, it is one of your own choosing."

"Of my choosing?"

"Yes. The explanation," added the outlaw's daughter, in a hard voice, "may be made in the name of one man—Bridle-path!"

"Ridiculous!"

"I knew him first," pursued Cynthia, "and you have no right to come between us. You see I am frank; I will confess that I love him!"

"You had better reserve the confession for his ears!" retorted Estella, with more spirit.

"I am free to say to you what I may not say to him."

"What are your love-affairs to me?"

"Much!—everything, when you come between Bridle-path and me. It was no fair contest, for you had worldly position and money in your favor. I know not that you would have won, but this I do know—your arts have brought you here; you are the prisoner of your rival!"

CHAPTER XXX.

PLOTTERS IN THE NEW REFUGE.

ESTELLA regarded the outlaw's daughter with feelings of mingled surprise, fear and perplexity.

"All you say is strange to me," she declared. "If the man who gives the unique name of Bridle-path is anything to you, you need have no fear that I shall rob you of him. I have seen him but a few times, and then, only briefly. He is nothing to me!"

"What are you to him?" Cynthia demanded, sharply.

"Nothing."

"Tis false!"

"Miss Giblon, you are laboring under a mistake which I would be glad to remove. I give you my word of honor that you are in error; I was never more surprised than by this accusation. Let me convince you of its falsity, for I want to bear no more than my just sins of commission and omission."

"Even at that, the load will be heavy enough!"

"True! But as to these charges. What is your authority?"

"My own eyes!"

"What have you seen?"

"You and Bridle-path have been together. He has sought your company; you have received him gladly; both you and he have talked love—"

"Never!" declared Estella, with emphasis.

"It was fast coming to that."

"Wrong! More than that, whatever claim you ever had on Bridle-path, remains unbroken as far as I am concerned."

Cynthia was silent. She was not convinced, but found it hard to support a theory which had no further proof than her individual opinion. She had taken a violent fancy to Bridle-path, and was shrewd enough to suspect that she had

no hope of winning him if he was permitted to see Estella. Evidence to this effect was convincing, but very hard to demonstrate to others.

Estella saw her hesitation, imagined she was yielding, and redoubled her own efforts. She feared for her safety in the outlaw camp—if she could gain the wild girl of the mountains as a friend, it would be no mean advantage gained.

While she talked Cynthia listened, but not to be convinced. In the midst of the argument the outlaw's daughter turned abruptly and walked away.

She had lingered too long, already. While she was talking Graf Giblon had again set out to go to the lookout, only to be accosted on the way by Mrs. Westcott.

"Is the enemy coming?" she asked.

"Whose enemy?"

"Ours!"

"Humph! Have we adopted you?"

"In this case, your enemies are mine. Can I go to the lookout with you?"

She smiled her best smile. Graf glanced at Cynthia. He was not fascinated by Daisy, but was anxious to humiliate his daughter.

"Come!" he directed, briefly.

The adventuress went. They left the camp by a *detour*, and then ascended the acclivity. It was a hard climb, and the cunning plotter found it advisable to ask for Graf's aid the greater part of the way. His reward was in the form of smiles which she tried to render charming.

Reaching the summit, even her unpracticed mind strongly realized the advantage of the position. The lookout was among low trees which rendered the watchers invisible from below, while the range of their own vision was remarkable.

The spot selected for the use of the glass was at the verge of the summit, where it ended abruptly at a precipice which extended a thousand feet downward. Beyond was the valley in which Glory Eden was situated, and the town was plainly visible.

Mrs. Westcott made herself as much felt and seen as she could and not be officious, and was permitted to look through the field-glass. With its aid she was enabled to see the search-party from Glory Eden moving on.

"They are hunting for the trail," she remarked.

"Much good may it do them! They can't find it."

"We seem to be pretty secure."

"Ef they want a fight they hev only ter say so. How d'ye s'pose it would end?"

"You could drop them like beeves in the slaughter-house."

"Right, by mighty!"

"I feel perfectly safe."

Graf looked at the speaker curiously. Was she sincere? He was not one to trust others readily, and her interest was too sudden and strong to please him.

"Anyhow, I won't give her a chance ter do harm," he thought.

After awhile they descended to the camp, again.

"I have some skill in the line of surgery," remarked the adventuress, sweetly. "If any our men are wounded, I shall be glad to care for them. Have you medicines, also?"

"Yes; that's a casewful in the cave."

"Judiciously selected?"

"Wal, I dunno; I took them on somebody else's recommend. Mebbe I got cheated."

"Let me see them, and I can tell."

Graf found the woman rather amusing, and, as Cynthia was again watching them, obeyed the last request. They went to the cave and she looked the medicines over with interest. If Graf had known just how deep her interest was, he would have stopped her work at once.

After they left the cave the outlaw went away, and Mrs. Westcott sought Mr. Curtis's presence.

"A gloomy outlook!" she observed.

"My poor Estella!" the mine-owner sighed.

"Better for her if she were plain-looking, now."

"The outlook is truly disheartening."

"What will you give me to save you?"

"What can you do?"

"That depends. Whatever I try, I take my chances to make or break. I covenant with you only in case I can deliver you and our Estella out of the hands of these Philistines."

"Have you a plan?"

"Charles, don't be so inquisitive; my methods are not to be made public. What is liberty worth to you and her?"

She nodded toward Estella.

"Five thousand dollars!" Curtis replied, quickly.

"And you will give that?"

"Yes."

"With that in hand I could afford to drop the other claim," observed the adventuress, thoughtfully. "I suppose you would hush Mandred up?"

"He cannot have a dollar from me!"

"But, as Estella's brother—"

"He is not her brother!"

"No?"

"The paternity of the Cuban is nothing to me; I know not who he is. With Estella it is different. She is my own child."

"When I visited your house with Eastman, a remark you let drop led me to think he had blackmailed you by threatening to accuse you of slaying Richard Mayo."

"Mayo died without help. Of late I have listened to many lies about him, but the story current at Glory Eden is correct; he fell down a shaft at the Black Bear Mine, and was killed."

"There is some mystery about the case I can't grasp."

"Possibly, Mayo was Manfred's father," Curtis thoughtfully remarked. "Mayo was twice married. I know his first wife was of foreign birth, and she may have been a Cuban. It was the second wife who came to Glory Eden; a slight, pale, gentle woman, who was wholly unfit for life in the mines."

"Was Mayo a kind husband?"

Curtis started and fixed an almost frightened gaze upon Mrs. Westcott.

"Why do you ask?"

"I have an impression that all did not go well when Mayo, his wife and you started this town of Glory Eden. Mayo was no angel; that is certain; and there may have been clashing in the camp."

"Whatever the truth was, it is a thing of the past. Both went to their long account many years ago."

"Some one, or something—let us use an Indian form of speech, and say 'a little bird'—has whispered to me that this second wife of Mayo's was not less interesting to you than was Mayo's child. Pardon me, I mean *your* child, Estella. But it is of Mayo's wife I speak."

"What is her life to you?" Curtis broke forth almost fiercely.

"What, indeed?" the adventuress replied, with a confident smile. "I only want to let you see I am well informed as to your past. That lady, around whom hangs no mystery, I feel sure, had her choice, to marry—Mayo or you. She chose not wisely, and lived to repent it. Mayo was a brutal husband, and she had to suffer. But you, sir, were as true to her as a dog to its master. You remained by her to the end. Whether Mayo knew you were a discarded suitor I know not, but in your fancy for the lady an enemy might find reason for the death of the husband—if, as is alleged, he died by means other than accident."

That this slow, confident speech was extremely cutting and unpleasant to the mine-owner was certain. His face bore the shadow of mental suffering.

Controlling himself with an effort he made answer:

"What do you gain by all this talk?"

"You can see how valuable I am to you."

"I do not see it!"

"No?"

"Those who beset me with lies gain nothing. And I tell you, once for all, that I'll not be blackmailed out of one more dollar!"

The usually meek man was thoroughly aroused, as the adventuress could see. She essayed to put her hand caressingly on his arm, but he shrank from the touch. Not in the least chagrined, she replied:

"Believe me, I contemplate no such step. All I now aspire to do is to bind the bargain we have made; I want you to see it will be of interest to you to keep your word."

"I always keep my word."

"And you will give five thousand dollars if I free you and Estella from these devils' clutches?"

"Yes."

"It shall be done!"

"How?"

"Don't ask me; wait and see. And don't wonder at what goes before. I am having big swing here, but it is purely the force of audacity. I have as much to fear as you; these men are fiends incarnate. Thus far I am safe, I hope, to keep it up awhile longer, and if I do—mark my words!—something will happen here. Wait and see!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

CHALLENGED IN CAMP.

GRAF GIBLON was in an aggressive and confident mood, and his step was that of a conqueror as he walked the new refuge. Absolutely as he had ruled at Lucifer Annex, he had always been under a cloud, in that the island-people were despised and ostracized, and dared not strike at their enemies.

Now, the mask was thrown off; Graf was a rebel and a warrior; and his air was not without an impressive element. Well supplied with provisions and arms, he fancied the mountain camp could long be defended against all comers, and he gloried in the prospect.

Patiently the outlaws had prepared for this crisis in the days gone by, and the store of food, and other necessities proved their zeal.

Now, all was ready for fighting, and it was not all to be on the mountain-top. Glory Eden had not yet been sufficiently marked with fire, but he intended it should be before many days.

But Graf, discerning and suspicious as he usually was, was not equal to the demands of this occasion. There were plotting women in

camp, and there lay the greatest danger to his cause.

To spite Cythia, he still allowed Mrs. Westcott the freedom of the camp. Better for him had he invited his known enemies in and met the crisis, at once.

From the lookout, the advance of the enemy was watched constantly. The outlaws experienced grim pleasure as they noted signs which showed how at fault the pursuers were. Their trailers went here and there in erratic style, but betraying the fact that no trail had been found.

Still, the advance was generally in the right direction, and there was a possibility that the refuge would be found in the course of the ensuing thirty-six hours.

"But it 'll be luck ef at all!" the leader declared. "Why, I'd as soon have a pack of old women for the job as them fools. They don't know a trail from a pine tree. Lads, that's a heap o' fun ahead o' us!"

Graf Giblon's word "went" in that crowd, and he was duly applauded by his followers.

The day wore on without anything of more interest than further quarreling between Graf and Cythia. She was really alarmed by the liberties granted Mrs. Westcott, and tried to convince her father, but all this made him the more obstinate.

Daisy retained her position in camp.

She came no more to Curtis or his daughter. She ignored them wholly, in which course she was followed by every one else. They were allowed no liberties, but forced to keep within certain limits. They made no effort to take more freedom than was allowed them, but the mine-owner was not wholly hopeless.

He remembered Daisy's promise, and began to have an exaggerated opinion of her shrewdness.

He was more than willing to give her the specified sum to secure freedom.

By nightfall chance had brought a portion of Glory Eden searchers near the camp; so near that indiscreet action on the part of the outlaws would have resulted in discovery. But the day waned, and the war-party had to cease work for awhile.

They went into camp, and as the darkness grew more pronounced the watchers on the cliff looked down and saw them around the fires they had built, a grim force, armed and stern, yet unconscious of the actual situation.

Only Graf's iron will kept the outlaws in check, then. Hating the Glory Edenites as they did, they longed to show defiance and derision; but with this pleasure barred out, they contented themselves with the saying of all the insulting things they could think of, in discreet tones.

Their confidence increased, and they swaggered about the camp, anticipating the weary search the rival party was likely to have, and the fight which would ultimately follow.

In this fight they expected to have all the advantage.

It sometimes happens, however, that when one's position seems the strongest, it is the weakest.

The night had advanced to one o'clock.

All was quiet in the rescuers' camp, and the decaying light of their fires showed them stretched out in slumber.

In the rival camp darkness prevailed, but all was equally silent. Every one appeared to be asleep unless it was the sentinels. They were supposed to be alert.

Here, appearances were deceptive.

When the marauders came to the new refuge it had been by means of the western slope, the only scalable point, and those who thought the place so secure would have been dumfounded, now, to see that each and every one of the sentinels, instead of standing faithfully on post, had succumbed to some influence.

This was discovered by a woman who came from the camp and regarded them closely.

One was sitting on the ground, another lying at full length, while a third, with his person braced against a rock, was sleeping in that position.

The woman smiled grimly.

"All out of the race!" she commented. "I have not miscalculated, and the work will go on merrily unless some abstainer bobs up to baffle me."

She turned and went back to camp. There, the outlaws were rolled up in their blankets and showed no signs of life. She passed among them with light steps and approached the point where Charles Curtis and Estella were confined.

A special guard had been set over them, but this woman wanderer already knew he was oblivious of his trust, and sleeping like the rest.

She passed him and entered the recess.

There she could see nothing, but she soon stumbled over some one.

"Who is it?" came the question, in Curtis's voice.

"Hush! are you here, and awake?—you and Estella?"

"Yes, Mrs. Westcott."

"Good! I see you obeyed my order and drank no coffee. Your reward is at hand. Are you bound?"

"Our hands are bound, and ropes go from our waists to yonder point of rock."

"I will cut them."

"Is there really hope of escape?"

"Not so loud! As I hinted to you I put laudanum in the coffee, but, not being accustomed to feeding the stuff to an army at once, I don't know how well I have done the job; I may have given enough so not one of them ever will waken, or it may be that a slight sound will arouse all in a twinkling."

"Madam, we are deeply grateful—"

"Prove it, not with words, now, but with cash, later!"

As she spoke these terse directions the adventuress cut the last of the bonds, and Curtis and Estella were free—free, but still in the outlaw camp.

"Follow me!" the plotter added. "The sooner we are out of this den, the better. I am the only friend you have here."

She smiled, even then, at the idea. Her friendship went where money came. Even in the camp she had hesitated whether to fascinate Graf, and win brief power, or to cast her lot with his enemies. The chance to win five thousand dollars had decided her.

There was no good or unselfish motive in what she had done.

The trio left the recess. There was no moon, but in the starlight much was to be seen. The grim figures stretched out all around sent a chill to Estella's blood, and she kept closer to Mr. Curtis, a weak protector, but a true friend.

Slowly and carefully they threaded their way among the sleeping forms, then, when the last was passed, went on toward the sentinels. Curtis was still anxious, but his inquiries brought up the fact that those men, drugged like the others, were asleep at their posts. And for the first time he began to feel real hope.

But another power was active in camp.

The sentinels were not reached when a figure suddenly appeared from behind the point of the cliff and approached them.

Mrs. Westcott gave an exclamation of alarm which was almost a gasp, but then discovered that the other wanderer was a woman.

"Cynthia!" she muttered, in disgust.

Low as the word was spoken, it reached the hearing of the person mentioned, and the reply came swiftly:

"Yes; it is Cynthia. No doubt you are glad to see me?"

No one was prompt with an answer, and the girl abruptly raised a rifle.

"Do you want to see me?" she asked.

"No," Daisy confessed, irritably and nervously.

"I thought not. Where are you going with your procession?"

The adventuress was silent.

"You can return whence you came," Cynthia pursued. "You are crafty, woman, but you may as well understand that there are others as wise as you. Although you have imitated Judas, you will not win the prize. You can return to camp!"

Coolly and resolutely the outlaw's daughter spoke, and she made due impression. Not one of the trio felt capable of acting a warrior's part, and only Mrs. Westcott was armed. But the revolver she carried remained undrawn. At that moment she was as much awed as if Cynthia were a man; she felt herself in just as much danger as if that condition of affairs prevailed.

"Girl" spoke Mr. Curtis, after a painful pause, "I beg that you will not be too hard upon us. Consider the circumstances, and if a feeble old man will not move you to pity,—the mine-owner only wished he had weapons so he could meet her on equal terms—"let your feelings be touched by the misfortunes of those of your own sex."

"Bosh!" was the quick retort. "I don't care to hear a preacher, anyhow, and even if I did, I'm not to be converted in this case. Pity—and for her?"

With an imperious gesture Graf's daughter threw all of her hatred into the last words, and the folly of argument was plainly seen.

Curtis tried to summon his courage.

"Since you will not listen to the voice of mercy, let our decision be made. We are going to leave the camp; if you demur, you shall go as our prisoner."

She laughed mockingly.

"Who will capture me?"

"We will."

"Oh! shades of Julius Caesar! that war should find such disciples as these!" scoffed the girl. "So you are going away! Try it, and see! You would make me prisoner? You lack the power! Why, one cry from me would rouse my sleeping braves, but I do not need to sound it. Attempt to pass, or lay hands on me, and I will shoot you dead!"

"But, young woman—"

"No words, sir! You can't pass. All the scheming here has come to nothing, simply because I was suspicious from the first. Graf Giblon and his men sleep like clods, but my resolve not to close my eyes, to-night, was not taken foolishly; I knew the ways of women better than Captain Giblon. Now, you can return to your

place of confinement as soon as you please. You can't leave here!"

"Am I allowed to have a voice in this matter?" asked a quiet voice behind Cythia.

She turned quickly. A man stood there, one who had come from somewhere so quietly that none of the group was aware of his presence until he spoke.

General surprise followed.

"Bridle-path!" Cythia exclaimed.

"Yes."

"How did you pass the sentinels?"

"They did not object."

"Then they are false to their trust."

"That may be," the surveyor replied, quickly. "However, I am not here to pass judgment on them."

The outlaw's daughter drew a quick breath.

"Why are you here?"

"Not with any hostile motive, if you will look at the matter rightly. Yet, I have a purpose to carry out. I have come to take yonder persons back to Glory Eden."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FIGHT ON THE PICKET LINE.

BRIDLE-PATH motioned toward Mr. Curtis and Estella. His manner was very quiet, but even in that even voice there was that which told of fixed resolution. Estella felt her courage and hopes revive, and she began to realize that it was no trifling matter to have an athletic young man as a champion.

Cythia drew a sharp breath, audible to all there.

"Are you in earnest?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Yes, Miss Giblon," the surveyor answered.

"You have heard me say they can't go?"

"True, but I trust—"

"Would you turn against me, after all our friendship in the past?"

"Heaven forbid that I should be forgetful of what you have done. I remember Roaring Bill and his cronies; I remember how you helped me when I needed help. For that I am grateful—"

"This is the time to prove it!"

"How?"

"Not by turning against me; not by aiding my foes; not by defying my will when you have heard it expressed."

"But would you call me a man, and worthy of the name, if I left an aged man and a helpless girl in the power of outlaws, pillagers and marauders?"

"Whatever the mountaineers have done, they had good cause for it."

"How did Estella Curtis ever do them harm?"

Cythia was silent. Estella was her prisoner, and not one of the outlaws had approved of the introduction of the prisoners in the camp. If she tried to establish contrary evidence she would quickly be contradicted.

"Are the island people always to be condemned?" she at last asked, resentfully. "Am I always to be misjudged? Must we endure all, and never murmur?"

"You nor the island people have been injured by me," the surveyor replied. "For them I have no friendship, but I wish you well. I forget nothing, and wish to remain your friend. More than that, if you will leave your associates I will place you with kind friends who will care for you."

"An eagle has no wish to be caged," she moodily interrupted.

"At least, do not spoil your past good record. We are losing precious time here, and a decision must be reached at once. Will you not add to your good reputation, and say that the prisoners can go?"

"Never!"

"Consider—"

"I say, never!"

"Then," added Bridle-path, firmly, "we must resort to other measures. I have followed the trail patiently to find this camp, and, now it is done, am not inclined to lose all advantages. Miss Giblon, the prisoners must go free!"

"Attempt to take them, and I will sound a cry that will rouse the sleeping mountaineers as one man!" fiercely retorted Cythia.

"Perverse girl! would you turn me against you?"

"I can't lose what I never had, but I won't lose what I have now. I tell you that if you persist in this outrage I will arouse the camp. Do you understand what that means? Instead of taking them away you, too, will be a prisoner!"

With the sincerest good will for the wayward girl, Bridle-path had tried to use kindness toward her, but the Giblon temper and dogged will had come to the front, and he knew he might as well argue with the adjacent cliff.

With a quick movement he flung one arm around her waist, at the same time clasping his free hand over her mouth.

"This is *your* work, not mine," he remarked, sternly. "You must yield!"

She did not yield tamely, and struggled for a while, but when she saw how futile her efforts were, pride led her to stand passive in his grasp.

"Go on!" he added, hurriedly, addressing the trio of prisoners. "The sentinels are asleep,

and I think we can pass them. Go quickly, and I will follow after. Miss Giblon, I must ask you to accompany us past the picket line, but you shall receive all possible consideration. Come!"

For a moment Cythia rebelled; then she walked quietly by his side. Curtis, Estella and Mrs. Westcott were glad to receive the order, and they started the flight.

Calm as his prisoner now was, Bridle-path was not lulled into any false feeling of security. He thought it possible that she might attempt to free her mouth from the control of his hand, and did not once relax his hold.

But Cythia was fertile in expedients. She did not intend to lose her rival, and rapid thought showed her a way in which she could offset Bridle-path's superior strength. She was going along quietly when, suddenly, she made a pretense of stumbling, and without any feint to recover, threw all of her weight sharply forward.

The trick worked well.

The surveyor's hold was broken, and in a moment more her alarm-cry pealed forth on the still air as only a woman's voice could sound it:

"Help! help! Ho! mountaineers, awake! Help!"

Bridle-path was struck with dismay. Unconscious of the fact that the outlaws had been drugged, he expected to see every man spring up at once, and the camp become like an angry bee-hive.

There was no time to delay, nor could Cythia be considered further. She had done the mischief, and could add but little to it.

He sprung forward and caught Estella's arm.

"Hasten!" he cried; "every moment is precious. There will be fighting now, but you must give every effort to escape. Go down the slope, and trust the rest to chance. Your friends are in the mountains."

"There is no fear," coolly observed Mrs. Westcott. "The Luciferites are drugged with laudanum, and Gabriel's trumpet won't waken them—I hope."

She had some doubt on the subject, and it was well founded. Cythia's cries were still ringing behind them, and Bridle-path, looking back, saw the outlaws leaping up. But, worst of all, the once-sleeping sentinels were stirring, and two who were directly in their path rose together like machines and presented their rifles.

The surveyor set his teeth with dogged resolution. He deemed himself alone in the contest, for Charles Curtis certainly was not of use in a fight, and proceeded to act accordingly.

Dropping Estella's arm he rushed upon the nearest sentinel. His revolver was ready for use, but he preferred not to let its voice be heard there. He knocked the rifle-barrel aside, and with a scientific blow felled its owner.

By that time the second sentinel had gained light on the situation, and he pulled the trigger of his rifle.

Where he had aimed no one could tell; he, like the other guards, though on his feet, was dazed by the effects of the drug. This had spoiled his aim. The bullet went wild, and, before he could repeat the demonstration, Bridle-path seized and flung him crashing down the slope.

By this time a third guard had arrived and was trying to sight his weapon, but he had not counted on an obstacle in the shape of Mrs. Westcott.

Her hand was raised, and she sent a bullet through his arm at just the right moment.

By this time all was uproar in the camp, and Graf Giblon's voice rose in hoarse orders. If the fugitives ever were to escape then was the time to do it, and Bridle-path realized the fact.

He saw with dismay that Curtis and Estella had not obeyed his order and improved the flying seconds; they were standing dazed and frightened, as was natural to those not experienced in such wild scenes.

"Down the slope!" he again cried, and gave the mine-owner a push in that direction.

The outlaws, directed by Cythia, were hurrying toward the picket line, and Bridle-path with unwavering courage prepared to meet them. He caught up the undischarged rifle and stood firm, while the non-combatants finally roused to obedience and hastened down.

But even as they went Estella heard Cythia's voice:

"Never mind the man! The prisoners have gone below. Hasten after them, or the enemy will soon be in our camp!"

"May Heaven protect him!" Estella murmured, thinking more of the man who had remained to face such great odds.

"Keep together, all," urged Mr. Curtis, in an unsteady voice. "We may all escape."

"The first outlaw who touches us, dies!" declared Mrs. Westcott, whose courage was buoyed up by visions of the reward for saving her companions. "My revolver is not yet empty!"

The descent was dangerous at all times, and in the semi-darkness, more than ever so. They slipped more than once, and yet dared not moderate their pace.

On the level above they heard the shouts of men and the sound of revolvers. How long could Bridle-path last against such odds?

Estella's head swam dizzily; she could not see distinctly; she made a misstep, slipped, tried in

vain to recover her balance, and then went sliding down—where? To what fate?

It seemed an age before she stopped, and she imagined herself falling into a deep gulf where life would be dashed out of her by the shock, but at last, confused, bruised and shaken, but not seriously hurt, she was deposited at the foot of the descent.

Where was she?

Where were her friends?

She looked up and saw a wall of rock. She was amazed. Surely, she had not fallen from that; it would have been a death-fall. But as she looked down, and remembered how peculiarly she had fallen, the truth came to her. The sheer rock had not been sheer before, but her movements on an insecure part of its covering had started a landslide. She had gone along with it, and been saved from death in this peculiar way.

Eagerly she scanned the top of the rock, but could see no one.

What was she to do? She dared not call, and could not return the way she had descended.

One course, only, seemed open to her, and she started to follow along the base of the rock until she could ascend and join Mr. Curtis. She went, but an alarming fact soon presented itself; the level of the ground dropped away rapidly, and, in consequence the rock grew to the height of a cliff.

Once, she stopped, feeling that every movement was taking her further away from her friends, but a loud, hoarse voice above, toward the rear, told of the proximity of an outlaw. That settled the question. Better solitude, better almost any danger than the companionship of the marauders.

Her way gradually assumed the shape of a gulch with sharply-rising walls, and to the place no sound was borne. Frequently she paused to listen, but always with the same result.

She had no means of knowing whether peace or war existed above.

At last she reached a point where ascent was possible, and, her courage having revived, she improved the chance and went up to the level.

The ridge where lay the camp was clearly defined against the sky, but further away than she had thought. No light was visible there, nor could she hear any sound.

What was she to do now? Where was Mr. Curtis? Where, Bridle-path?

"Brave, generous man!" she exclaimed, "I hope his work for us has not brought him into trouble."

"Lo! Lady Judas prays!" exclaimed a mocking voice.

Estella turned quickly. A woman stood beside her.

It was Cythia!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE IRON HAND OF A RIVAL.

"So I've found you, at last!" exclaimed the outlaw's daughter.

Estella did not answer. She looked at Cythia in fear, feeling that solitude in the mountains was better than the wild girl's company. Cythia united the masculine with the feminine, then; Estella could see a revolver in her hand, and her manner was bold, confident and imperious.

"Have you any tongue?" she added, sharply.

"Yes."

"Then why don't you speak? Perhaps you scorn to hold converse with one so lowly as me, but you are not placed so you can afford to be too lofty."

"You misunderstand me wholly," Estella answered. "I never was given to what you term lofty ideas, and in the dreadful events of this night even towering pride would find its death-blow."

"So you feel it all, do you? I'm glad of it; glad you suffer. Where are your confederates? Where, the Westcott Jezebel? Where, Bridle-path?"

"I don't know."

"When did you see them last?"

"At the camp. I fled in horror while the men fought. I fell from the top of a bank, and have seen no one since. Tell me," Estella added, "how did the fight result?"

"How, but in discomfiture for the Giblonites," Cythia answered, in a hard voice. "What do you expect except eternal misfortune for them? Fate hath us all in its grasp, and its bitterest gifts are reserved for the island people. Perhaps there is a curse on us. But why do I moralize? I hate such talk. You ask how the fight ended. I will tell you."

Fresh fierceness crept into the girl's voice, and Estella trembled for her own safety. Cythia hated her. The revolver was ready for use. To what desperate step might she not go? Curtis's daughter longed to flee, but dared not.

Cythia was thoroughly at home in the mountains. She was sure of foot and agile.

"Your plot worked well," the island-girl added. "I knew something was afoot, some danger in the air, but I could not grasp it. I warned Graf Giblon, but this only made him the more careless. I could not avert the danger I could not comprehend. I know now that the

mountaineers were drugged, but so slightly that most of them awoke when the alarm sounded. If all had been clear-headed it would have been different, but they came up stupid and confused, and only a few were fit for fighting."

"And they—lost?"

"They lost! The force is broken and scattered. Some remain at the camp. I know not whether the living make a pretense of holding the position. The dead lie in valor."

"But they had only one man to face—"

"Wrong! Bridle-path had not to fight alone. I know not how it chanced, but armed men came to his aid, and, as I said, the mountaineers, dazed and surprised, were defeated and scattered."

"And my father?"

"I know nothing of him."

"Nor of Mrs. Westcott?"

"No."

A brief silence followed, during which Cythia eyed her companion with the intentness of a bird of prey.

"You do not ask for Bridle-path?" she added.

"I presume you do not know where any one person is."

"Disingenuous as usual! My Lady of the blue blood thinks every one is blind. Why doesn't she speak from her heart and say: 'What do I care for trivial matters? Tell me of the man I love! Did he fall in the fight? Is he wounded? I beseech you, tell me of Bridle-path!' That is what you would say were you frank, but you double and turn like a hunted hare. Well, I shall not tell you of him!"

Estella moved uneasily. It was plain that Cythia was in a dangerous mood. Her utterance was bitter, and the night's work had roused all the hostility in her nature.

As her companion did not speak, she suddenly seized Estella's wrist and ordered:

"Come!"

"Where?" Estella returned.

"Where I lead."

"Not back to the outlaws?"

"Perhaps; perhaps not."

"I prefer to remain where I am."

Cythia stamped angrily on the ground.

"It is not a matter where your preference counts for anything. I speak and you obey. You are my prisoner!"

"Are you sure?" returned Estella, endeavoring to speak with spirit. "I have endured all I can from you, and will endure no more. Go your way, and let me go mine. There is room in the mountain for both of us, if we keep apart. You hate me; then let me alone. I will not obey your imperious orders!"

She endeavored to release her wrist, but Cythia held her without trouble.

"Poor fool!" the island-girl muttered. "Do you think you can match my strength? If so, struggle on."

Her rival, however, stood quiet and in despair.

"Come!" Cythia added.

"What do you want?"

"My prisoner. Come!"

She started, herself, and dragged Estella after so roughly and resistlessly that the latter abandoned the vain resistance. She feared for her life, and took counsel of prudence. She was already a prisoner—what did it matter whether they went or stayed?

They went, and, keeping fast hold on the slender wrist, Cythia led—where? To her captive it seemed a vague and purposeless tramp, but the stronger spirit's steadiness indicated the reverse.

The way was rough and difficult. Estella's shoes were cut by ragged stones, and ledge and knoll made wearisome climbing.

At last the female captor stopped short and broke a long silence.

"Sit down!" she ordered.

Gladly Estella obeyed. With a weary sigh she sunk down on a rock, and Cythia was not slow to follow the example.

Then followed a long period of inactivity, though each was busy with her thoughts. Estella, at least, found no pleasure in this occupation. She feared and shrank from her companion. An hour passed, and to the captive all seemed as quiet as before, when Cythia suddenly sprung to her feet and raised her revolver. A man was before her, but he stood so still and apathetic that her first startled feeling vanished. Then she recognized him.

"Strawberry Sam!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, it's me."

The man with the birthmark looked alternately at the girls, and slowly added:

"I know you, and I know her!"

"Remarkable!"

He disregarded, perhaps did not realize, the sneer.

"I'm lookin' fer a man," he pursued. "His name is Bridle-path. Hev you seen him?"

"No."

"I'm sorry fer that."

"What do you want of him?"

"I want ter kill him! You see," the life-hunter explained, in the most matter-of-fact way, "et war settled some time ago that I was ter kill him, but I've been puttin' et off. Now, things hev got so mixed up hyer that et won't

do ter delay. I'll fix et up, right off, an' he won't miss a few days."

"If you want to do any killing, why not practice on yourself?" Cythia retorted.

"Bless me!" was the stupid answer, "what good would that do?"

"It would rid the world of a nuisance. You are not needed among us, Sam; go find some cliff, jump off and break your neck!"

The island-girl was not in the habit of expressing herself like this, but it angered her to think that a man so worthless should persistently seek Bridle-path's life, and refer to it so calmly. But, for a wonder, Strawberry Sam, who generally had no passion outside of his vendetta, took umbrage at the pointed remark.

"That's a kind way you hev o' speakin'," he grumbled. "I wouldn't say that ter a feller bein' who never did me harm. But I kin see why you do it. You an' her are favorites with him; you'd like me ter jump off a cliff, but I won't jump. I know my business. The flame o' the candle draws the miller; Bridle-path will come ter you—uns. I'll wait here; he will come!"

"How do you know you'll wait here?" the island girl retorted.

"Cause et's the best place."

"I'll tell you what you will do; you can march on. Your company is not wanted. Go!"

Strawberry Sam laughed in a guttural way.

"Lower yer revolver! I don't keer fer sech a trifile. Ef you hev that I hev more. I'm weighted down with weapons. They're fer him, but ef needs must, why, I'll use them on his friends. See?"

The fact that he was desperately in earnest was very evident to Cythia, and she took counsel of prudence. Good as her aim usually was she might, if she fired, fail to give a death-wound to this great mass of flesh termed man, and to miss, she felt sure, meant danger she did not care to tempt.

"I was only joking," she responded. "I feel sure you are not an enemy, and a friend is welcome here as friend never was welcome before. Let us sit down!"

Sam accepted the invitation, and she followed suit, but her plan to rid him of menace did not succeed. He looked at the girls and rubbed his hands together slowly.

"I'm glad I've found yer," he observed. "You are his friends, an' wot he likes he can't hev. You stay with me. You are my prisoners! Pretty gals are to my taste!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN DOUBLE CAPTIVITY.

THE idea impressed Strawberry Sam the more he dwelt upon it, and he added:

"Yes, yes; I like pretty gals; an' why shouldn't I keep them when I hev 'em? Daughters o' my own I ain't got, an' the only claim ter one, I lost. Now, why should I keep you two? Town life is rough an' boisterous, as we hev all seen, but in a cave we kin all three dwell in harmony, an' let nobody else come nigh us. Yes, yes!"

It was a new idea on the miner's part, but there was such evidence that he was taken with it that Cythia made haste to turn his mind from it.

"Who was the girl you lost?" she asked.

"Et war Vloma."

"Vloma? An odd name, surely. Who was she?"

"My sister's child."

"How did you lose her?"

"Ask Bridle-path!" the miner fiercely, quickly replied.

"Does he know?"

"I reckon. But she's dead; dead long ago. I know it, though I ain't got the proof. All I want now is ter be avenged on the man who took her. That's Richard Knox, or Bridle-path, as he calls himself."

"Did he really take her away?"

"Yes."

"And you blame him?"

"Blame him? Why, gal, I'm goin' ter kill him! Yes; his doom is sealed, an' I'm goin' ter close up the account. He's ez cunnin' ez Lucifer, an' he's put me off in one way an' another, but it won't do any longer. I shall kill him as soon as I get eye on him ag'in!"

"Tell me the story, won't you?"

Cythia cared but little for the event of the past, for she lived in the present and looked to the future, but she saw the need of getting this man's good will. Unless it was done she felt there was cause for fear. Practically, she and Estella were his prisoners.

Strawberry Sam hesitated for a few moments, and then slowly replied:

"Why not? I've always refused ter tell sence I come ter Glory Eden, but it was because I feared ter scare my man off. Now that I know him, it won't matter."

"Yes; I'll tell the story!"

"Vloma was my sister's child. Her mother died when the child was young, an' Vloma come ter live with me. Et war an odd experience fer me. I was a plain man, who never went among folks much, but delved away at muscular work all by myself, livin' alone in a shanty.

"But when the child came I built a little house, an' hired a woman ter care fer it.

"For awhile the solitude didn't please Vloma, but she got used to it, an' she was like a young deer in the mountains, an' her cheeks got rosy an' her limbs strong.

"She growed up ter young womanhood so.

"Gal, the way I loved that child passes all words. No heathen was ever so wrapped up in his idol. I could set by the hour an' worship her, an' I did it. The sound o' her voice was music ter my ears. When I wa'n't busy with my work I follered her 'round like a dog, an' jest feasted my eyes on her.

"The crash came when I was about eighteen year old. I knew wot the world was, an' I never had allowed her ter go to the nearest town, or ter receive company, fer it would contaminate her. She had the housekeeper—a good woman about seventy year old—an' me, fer companions.

"That was enough.

"Sometimes she pleaded strong ter go mix with the frivolous gals in town, but there had been so much said about it, an' she knew my opinion so wal, that when the evil got ter work she was all the more sly.

"One afternoon I see her walkin' with a young man. I was fairly horrified, an' ef I'd been nigh enough I'd 'a' killed him then an' thar, but I had quite a tramp afore I got ter her, an' then he was gone.

"We had quite a set-to, then. I reminded her how I'd cautioned her about seein' the people o' the world, an' told her wot snakes they wuz, an' how I'd wanted ter bring her up right, an' keep her right.

"Wot d've s'pose she said?

"She defended the feller, an' said he was a gentleman. Gentleman! Bah! She didn't know that war another name for 'scoundrel.'

"Then she accused me o' makin' a nun o' her, an' denyin' her privileges that other gals had, an' all that sort o' thing; an' I seen she was going bad, fast. But I give her all the chance I could; I told her wot was best fer her, forbid her seein' the young feller ag'in, an' let it rest. But it wa'n't no use; I learned he had called on her ag'in. Then I moved energetic.

"I learnt the feller's name as 'twas known thar, an' that he was a college feller, or somethin' like it, visitin' there. I called on him, an' tol' him in plain words that I'd shoot him ef he ever seen Vloma ag'in. An' I told her I'd keep her on bread-an'-water fer a month ef she see him ag'in.

"I reckon these hints would hev worked," continued Sam, naively, "but my neighbors chipped in an' all took her part.

"They said an honest, square young feller wanted ter marry her, an' I war a brute fer goin' ag'in' them. This sort o' talk went on until I went ter one o' the neighbors, thrashed him so he was sick in bed fer a week, an' give notice ter the others ter quit.

"That stopped their chinnin', but et didn't do no good at home. One mornin' Vloma was missin'; she had run away with Richard Knox!

"The shame of it was awful, but I knew jest wot my duty was. I took my revolvers an' went on the trail. The first clew I got was that a sartain minister had married them. I called on him, an' he said 'twas so, but that he didn't know where they had gone.

"But I kept it up, goin' hyer an' thar, an' thinkin' of my gal in the hands o' that wretch. I knew he would break her heart some time, an' I swore ter kill him yet.

"At last I got close on ter them, an' a right smart chase followed. Fer three weeks I was at their heels, an' though I didn't git hand on 'em, they got mighty scant time ter sleep. Four times they had ter dust out at night, gittin' out o' the house by a rear winder, an' runnin' fer life.

"Then I lost them fer awhile, but come onto them ag'in'. This time I planned ter make sure, an' was so sly that I broke into their room all right at night.

"We had an awful set-to thar. I fired three shots at Knox, and Vloma was screamin' an' beggin' fer mercy, an' then him an' me had a hand-ter-hand fight, but afore I overpowered him, help came fer them, an' I was captured.

"They run away, an' wasn't thar at my trial, but I got a year in prison fer disorderly conduct. I served it, but 'most pined myself away, thinkin' o' my poor gal married ter that scoundrel.

"When I came out my money was all gone, so I went ter a city ter get a job an' make more. I got a place as cook, an' saved up all I could.

"Now, a strange thing happened thar. When I got ready ter leave I went, one night, without givin' warnin'. The last meal I cooked was fer a gang o' young fellers, an' Richard Knox was one on 'em. He got sight o' me an' nigh fainted, but I didn't see him at all.

"Fate was all ag'in' me, fer, as I said, I left that night, an' never knew how near I'd been ter him until long after. Ever sence I've been huntin' fer him, the wide world over. Vloma is dead. I know it, because I dreamed it three nights in succession. How, or when, or where, she died, I don't know.

"Richard Knox I hev found—though he denies it—an' he is a doomed man."

"Until a few days ago I didn't know the name, nor how the man looked I was buntin' fer. He called hisself Basil Trenton, but Vloma, herself, told me it wasn't his true name; he had took it because he wanted to sink out o' sight durin' vacation, an' not hev his friends git word from him, he said."

"That's w'ot I call a fool-reason!"

"Ez fer his face, when he wuz with Vloma he was too fur away fer me ter tell much about him; when I called on him it was the dark o' the evenin' an' he had no lamp lit; an' when we had our fight in the room, the only light was moonlight, an' not much of that."

"Yes; it was mighty queer I never got sight o' his face, but fate was ag'in' me you see. I started out not knowin' his name or looks; I had only one clew ter him."

"That was the birthmark on my arm."

"That first night when I called on him I accused him o' never comin' openly ter my house, an' he declared his first call had been open, with me at the door. I give him the lie, but he answered in about these words:

"I'll prove all I assert. When I called you were asleep, it is true, an' did not see me, but one thing about you is impressed on my memory. You sat on the ground, yer back ag'inst the wall, an' one o' yer arms layin' on the doorstep. That arm was bare, an' on it I saw a red mark so peculiar that I stopped an' stared at it. It seemed like a huge strawberry, an' recalled all the jokes I'd heard about strawberry marks. I'll wager something no other livin' man has one like it, an' ef I see your arm in any quarter o' the globe, I'd know it. It's a ghost that can't be laid!"

"So said the feller ter me, an' I recalled it when I set out ter hunt him down. His name an' looks I didn't know, but the birthmark was the only clew. So I went all over the country, my arm bared ter the elbow ter show the mark, huntin' my man that way, thinkin' when I found him, he would turn pale an' show guilt."

"But, really, he never turned a hair when I did find him an' put it under his eyes."

Strawberry Sam ceased to speak.

Cynthia regarded him attentively.

"Are you *sure* you've found your man?"

"Be I?"

"Yes."

"Why, of course!"

"Has Bridle-path confessed?"

"No."

"He even denies it, don't he?"

"Yes, but—"

"What proof have you that he is the man?"

"Wal, I've suspected it fer some time, but I wasn't sure until I got a letter sayin' it was so."

"From whom?"

"He signed hisself Diogenes."

"An anonymous letter, eh?"

"Ye-es."

"Then," said Cynthia, emphatically, "it is my opinion you are all in the wrong. I have had a friend at Glory Eden who was not generally known as my friend, and I've taken some notice of your blindfold-vendetta. I don't believe Bridle-path is the man."

"I know better," Strawberry Sam stubbornly replied.

"Well, we won't quarrel about that. Perhaps I can help you find Bridle-path, if you will go with me."

"No, yer don't, gal! You would lead me inter the whole gang o' yer friends, an' my life wouldn't be worth a straw. I'll hang ter you, an' ter her!"

He pointed to Estella, who was as silent and motionless as if she had fallen asleep, but she had heard all.

Cynthia scowled upon the big miner.

"I think I'll sleep," she remarked, abruptly.

She settled back against the rock in an easy position and relapsed into silence, but through her half-closed eyes she constantly watched Strawberry Sam. She hoped he would be lulled into false security, and himself sleep. If he did, she was determined to escape and take Estella with her, even if violent means were necessary.

She still retained her revolver.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CYTHIA STRIKES.

ESTELLA kept her position in a kind of calm despair. For the present there was no hope for her, and she fully realized it. From this sprung her fictitious outward composure, but it was that of a hopeless rather than a heroic mood.

The mountain air seemed to grow colder, and she was so chilled that she doubted her ability to flee, even if chance was vouchsafed her.

In an indifferent way she meditated somewhat on the story told by Strawberry Sam. It was plain that he was wholly in the wrong in his vendetta. He had tried to shut Vloma out from the world, and all congenial company, and when she had asserted her rights and married the man of her choice, he had hunted that man like a criminal. Like Cynthia, Estella doubted if it was Bridle-path, but she was too wretched then to feel much interest in the matter.

The ease with which Cynthia seemed to fall

asleep was not comforting to her companion in captivity, though she liked the island-girl better thus than awake.

Strawberry Sam sat with his rifle resting across his lap, his big hands clasping the barrel.

When conversation ceased he seemed to sink into deep meditation, or stupidity, or some condition which made him almost statue-like. Now and then he moved his head a trifle and muttered to himself, but rarely looked around with any show of intelligence or interest. Then Estella became another plotter in camp. Cynthia seemed to sleep. If the miner would succumb also, perhaps she could steal away and make her escape.

Thus, she watched Strawberry Sam as closely as Cynthia, but without suspecting the latter's alertness.

At last luck seemed to favor the captives. Sam's head gradually dropped lower and became stationary at a point where further progress would have been unnatural. His breathing was audible.

Cynthia stirred a little. Did she dream? No; she reached out, moved her skirts, perchance to get more warmth from them; perchance, for some other purpose.

She coughed slightly. The miner did not stir.

She moved even more than before. Sam gave no heed.

Estella's gaze was on her rival. Thus far she had seen with no especial interest. What followed was very different. She saw Cynthia gather her limbs under her and rise to a kneeling position—hesitate—watch—then rise fully. She stood erect, and the miner slept on. Then Estella expected her to flee, but she knew not the stern material of which the outlaw's daughter was made.

Her chilled blood seemed to leap rapidly through her veins when she saw Cynthia draw a knife and move toward the sleeper.

The daughter of civilization gasped and was startled when she realized what was intended, but she made no sign. She could not; she was like one incapable of motion, physically, active as her mind was.

In justice to Cynthia it should be said that she never before had engaged in work like that now contemplated. She was imperious and self-willed, and her wild life had fostered these qualities of mind, but she never had been principal or accessory to actual crime.

Now, however, she intended to be rid of Strawberry Sam, and in such a way that she could hold Estella in her power.

Nearer she drew until she stood by the sleeper. She raised the knife and poised it for the blow. Knowing the necessity of making sure with the first stroke she had sought for a vital point, and the miner's position favored her. Bent forward as he was the back of his bronzed neck was fully exposed, and she realized that no better chance could be vouchsafed.

She aimed well. No tremor moved her nerves, and her natural aversion to such a deed had been crushed down.

"Now!" she thought.

She struck!

But, an instant before the knife started on its mission, Estella, wrought up to a pitch of painful nervousness by the long-delayed tragedy and its consequent horror, suddenly started and uttered a cry.

It was unexpected; it was inopportune. Cynthia, herself, found she had nerves. She gave a start; her aim was destroyed; but, too late to check the blow, she sped the knife with energy scarcely abated.

Strawberry Sam was saved by the interruption. The knife passed close to his neck, but did not touch the cuticle. Not so with the hand that held it. Her hand struck his neck very much as if in the form of a direct blow, and with force that nearly tumbled him over.

The alarm had come, and he sprung to his feet with agility not to be expected in one of his size.

It was an amazing picture which he saw. Cynthia had recovered her balance and stood with the knife still raised, her appearance Amazon-like to an extreme. Dull-witted as he was he comprehended that his life had been attempted; it only surprised him that he was alive.

As for Cynthia she saw her expected triumph vanish, and she could have turned the knife on Estella with good will.

But Strawberry Sam was not to profit by her failure. There was a stir beyond them, and a hoarse voice exclaimed:

"Knock the man on the head!"

"Bill Blood!" Cynthia exclaimed.

It was Roaring Bill, and with him were his inseparable companions. All three sprang upon the miner, and Sam received a staggering blow at the start.

He had dropped his rifle and was not in fit condition to fight, but his will was good. Recovering, he leaped at his assailants with an angry shout, but had better have spared his strength. Using their clubbed rifles they easily kept him at a distance, and a few blows felled him senseless to the ground.

"Kill the critter!" Phin Hicks exclaimed.

"No!" interrupted Center-shot Steve. "He's as much ag'in' the Glory Edens as we be, ef he ain't with us. Let him live; let anybody live who ain't their friend."

"Thar's logic in that," Roaring Bill agreed.

"The feller shall be let alone ef he's sensible." "Men, you have come just in time!" Cynthia exclaimed.

"We hev, eh?" Bill returued.

"Yes."

"That's about our think-so, too."

"I fear we would have been harmed by yonder brute, and your presence was never more welcome. Keep an eye on that girl and see she don't escape; she is my prisoner. If you have thongs, put her under restraint. Where is the band? Where is Graf Giblon? If there is any fire going, lead us there; the night is bitterly cold. Leave Strawberry Sam where he is, and guide us to the band."

Cynthia was herself again. With her followers at her side she ceased to be a victim of misfortune, she thought, and became her own self. She at once assumed the old air of authority, but was surprised at what followed.

Roaring Bill broke into a loud laugh, and Steve and Phin joined in the demonstration.

"What are you roaring about?" she asked, sharply.

"Take us fer woolly oxen, don't you?"

"Don't be absurd, Bill Blood. Let us get in motion. Stop that noise, too. What is there to laugh about?"

"You?"

"What of me?"

"Think you kin order us around in the old style, do yer? Don't know the band has gone ter smash an' every man got free walkin'-papers, do yer?"

"We remain, anyhow."

"We do, by mighty! but not as queen an' slaves. Gal, your day is over; we take no more orders from you!"

"What! do you rebel?"

"We rebel, my darlin'!"

"You are insolent. I shall report you to Graf Giblon."

"Report us ter yer gran'mother, ef yer want ter. We don't keer a cuss fer Graf, ef he is a good man. The band has gone ter smash, sure, an' we're our own bosses. We don't fear Graf, but obey him we will in all things fair, fer he's a square man. But his girl is no good!"

"Bill Blood, how dare you?" cried Cynthia, angrily. "You need the rod of correction. Such impertinence will not be tolerated."

"Gal, let us hev an understandin'. Things hev changed sence island days, an' nothin' more nor our position toward you. Fer years us three was your dogs. Ef you had a job ter be done, we did it fer you. We got our reward, too; yes, we did. How? Why, not exactly a dog's reward, fer dogs are praised when they do wal. You never praised us! Ef we did wal it was took as a matter of course, while ef we didn't do jest w'ot you wished, you abused us until the air was blue!"

Bitterly and vindictively spoke the outlaw, and she saw that he meant all he said.

"Bill, you wrong me," she began, more humbly, but he interrupted.

"No, I don't wrong yer; I don't wrong nobody. You know it's jest as I say. Ask Phin; ask Steve!"

"Right you are, Bill," Phin added. "We've been worse than dogs in the way she used us, but we bore it patient, an' we'd hev kept on the same way only you turned ag'in' the band."

"Correct!" declared Steve. "She got bewitched after the young hunter an' his poopy shape, an' went dead back on all her old friends. She's been goin' dead ag'in' us, an' abusin' us at the same time, but it's over now."

Cynthia began to be worried.

"Men, you are mistaken—"

"That'll do, gal. We may hev been yer dogs, before, but we ain't yer fools, now. Understand us, will yer? We've cast off allegiance ter yer; no more comin' an' goin' at the nod o' your head. See? But that's more. Eh, my bully braves?"

"Right!" Phin agreed.

"Ef you can't be our queen," pursued Roaring Bill, with slow and significant utterance, "you kin be our companion. Ef the days o' the band are over we may ez wal strike out fer ourselves, an' we want females ter cheer our lonely hours. Gals, you both go with us!"

"Just heavens!" Cynthia exclaimed.

"Don't like it, eh? Wal, we don't keer a rap ef you don't. Pooty faces ain't disagreeable ter our eyes. We keep w'ot we get; you are our prisoners. D'yee see, my darlin's?"

See? Cynthia was speechless with anger and dismay.

Bridle-path had warned her that the men might turn against her. The calamity had come, but was even worse than she could have imagined. She was dumfounded and dismayed.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE LYNCHERS' LARIATS.

BRIDLE-PATH did not find himself much the worse for the struggle at the outlaws' camp. Blows had been given and received, but he had no severe wounds, and those of minor import-

tance were borne with the philosophy which the hardy adventurer usually learns.

Only for the coming of reinforcements, however, it would have gone hard with him, for Cythia's alarming cries had brought out more foes than any one man could face.

When the mountaineers, outnumbered, dazed and disheartened, broke and ran in all directions, Bridle-path bethought himself of another duty.

Where were the non-combatants he had told to hurry away while he covered their retreat?

He had then no chance to advise them which way to go, and now had no means of knowing the direction they had taken, but with Giblon's men scattering here and there the danger became great that Mr. Curtis and Estella would fall into their hands again. For Mrs. Westcott he cared nothing.

Disregarding everything else, he hastened away to find those in whom he was most interested. Rapidly he threaded the paths, gulches and occasional thickets, but there was no sign of life. The outlaws had gone already, and the same seemed to be true of those he wished to find.

At last he came suddenly upon a man, but in a place so favorable to recognition that there was no hostile movement.

It was Manfred.

"Well met!" the latter exclaimed.

"Why so?"

"The times are out of joint, and I want a stout-hearted comrade. This is a glorious night, Bridle-path. It was I who led the reinforcements that gave you a lift when you were battling against odds, and I must say we all had a chance to get our fill. It made this Cuban blood of mine leap hotly, and it won't cool down. I want more fighting, and don't care much who the opponent is!"

Manfred made an impressive gesture, and his alert, nervous manner indicated that he had not used exaggeration.

Bridle-path felt little interest in the matter, however.

"Have you seen Curtis or his daughter?" the surveyor asked, practically.

"No."

"I should be greatly indebted to you if you would aid me in finding them."

"Nothing better. We may have a brush. Where did Cythia go?"

"I don't know; to Texas, I hope. She made all the trouble at the camp, by screaming like a steam whistle."

"Woman's way. When the fair sex set out to screech, the air quakes from Walla Walla to Memphremagog. Why can't they be content to swear, instead, like men? Lead on! I follow!"

"Let us act with system. We can leave the rival parties to fight their grudge out, but there is more important work for us to do. Charles Curtis and his daughter are somewhere in the mountains, and either prisoners or wanderers. Will you help me to find them?"

"Certainly. I were a brute to forget my sister, now."

"I am glad you are so brotherly."

"Frankly, I believe it is all nonsense. I have been the victim of many fairy tales, but a careful sifting of the evidence leads me to throw up the whole."

"What then?"

"Then E-tella is not my sister. But never mind; relationship, being something I never have sampled in my life, seems only a myth to me. Whatever may be the facts, I am ready to help you find her."

Bridle-path could find no fault with such an ally. If Manfred was careless he was ready, too, and would go into any fight willingly.

It had been no poor diagnosis when he said his wild blood had grown hot in the fever of war.

The search was continued. Here and there they went, searching the rough heart of the mountain, and meeting with all kinds of nature's freaks; but they met no one they wanted to find.

Several times they were near men who, they suspected, were outlaws, but a little care enabled them to avoid being seen. At last they paused in a gulch which proved a *cul-de-sac*. A wall of rock opposed further advance, and Manfred sat down and heaved a weary sigh.

"We are getting a good deal for our money," he remarked, complainingly.

"We must turn back, or—perhaps we can climb the rocks at one side."

He looked at the point indicated. It was a sharp ascent, half rock and half earth, with dwarfed trees hanging outward.

"I've had enough of hide-and-seek," the Cuban confessed. "Legs and lungs alike protest, and I move that we camp right here until morning. We may be wholly off the track, and we lack the nose of a bloodhound. Men are woefully weak on noses! We can't find Curtis and Estella to-night; why not lie down and rest ourselves?"

Bridle-path did not answer. He realized the wisdom of all that was said, but his own impatience made him unconscious of hardship and proof against weariness.

Where was Estella?

He found himself growing more and more interested in her, and he was eager to see her out of danger.

As he stood looking into the darkness, but seeing her face rather than the night, something else crossed his vision. A moving object—was it man or beast? He half-raised his rifle, and, as he did so, there was the sound of a blow behind him.

He turned and saw Manfred prostrate on the ground and other forms close at hand.

Quickly he essayed to bring the rifle to his shoulder, but the weapon was grasped at the muzzle by another hand, and several men sprung upon him at once. He was taken wholly at a disadvantage and could not meet them with system, but they had cause to remember his defense in after days. He gave blows that made them reel back as from a thunderbolt, and when they tried to confine his arms he broke their united hold.

But the odds were too great to be resisted long; he was finally overpowered, and a few turns of a lariat made him helpless.

While each of them was taking an inventory of his injuries Bridle-path used the only privilege left him, that of sight, to learn more of the case.

It needed but cursory examination to recognize them as members of the outlaw band. They numbered nine, all told.

The spirited resistance, which had brought more or less to each one in the way of bruises, had made them more angry than before, and was unnecessary, with the disaster of the camp still fresh in their minds.

"Boys," cried one, "we've got two o' the varmints that did us up. Why not make an example on them?"

"Good! Give us revenge! What shall it be?" returned another, the headlong spirit of the mob-element active within him.

"We hev lariats; there's trees a-plenty. What more is needed?"

"Hurrab! String them up! Hang the critters!"

So cried the self-constituted speaker, and the others fell into line. They were smarting under misfortune and eager for revenge, and cared but little who was the victim.

Manfred was bound just as he began to recover, and both prisoners were dragged to a tree selected for the occasion. It had firm hold on the wall of earth and rock, and hung over the gulch in a most satisfactory way.

One of the men climbed up and adjusted the ropes over the proper spot, and then the nooses were similarly fitted to the necks of the victims. Thus far the latter had made no remonstrance. This was not because life had no attractions for them, but simply because they realized the folly of appealing to such men for mercy.

As if by expressed agreement they stood in utter silence, not even answering the jeers of the captors.

"All ready, there?" demanded the leader.

"Yes," his followers replied.

"And you, gents—are you ready, too?"

"Pray consult your own convenience," Manfred returned, composedly.

"I will. You go up at once. If you discover any new stars while up there, please make report of it. Men, pull away when I say 'three!' Now! One, two—"

"Stop!" shouted a loud voice beyond the group, and a powerful figure broke the lines and flung the nearest men aside like toys. "What devil's work are you doin'?"

It was Graf Giblon, aggressive and imperious as ever, and the result showed he had lost no part of his influence over the rough crowd. They stood in silence like chastised dogs before their master.

"Wal," he uttered, with subdued wrath, "this is a fine employment I find you in!"

"These men belong at Glory Eden."

"Hev they ever harmed us?"

"Not that I know of, but they belong ter the same gang."

"You should know what you're doin' afore you go ahead so like a bull at a red flag. An' who give you leave ter hang anybody, anyhow?"

"Who give them leave ter kill our men at the camp?"

"Not I, an' I give no leave here. Ef we had the right ones I wouldn't say a word ef you hung all Glory Eden; I'd be glad ter hev it done. But these two men are not offenders. Really, they are not citizens of Glory Eden, an' we don't want ter make new enemies before we settle the old."

"I am glad, captain," Bridle-path observed, "that you take such a view of it. I really approve of your decision."

"Mister, I don't know whether you deserve mercy or not. I may learn, later."

"I trust you will set us free."

"No. That's just what I sha'n't do. Thar'll be no hangin', but I may hev use fer you, later. Cast off them nooses, men, and pack the two of them away in a corner, som'ers. I have one ter keep them company."

Other men had followed the chief, and Bridle-path saw that they had Charles Curtis in custody.

The word of Graf Giblon was still law, and the three prisoners were hustled into an alcove in the rocks and left to themselves, while the outlaws went apart and began a conference.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE HAND AT THE ROPE.

"WE are companions in misfortune," Curtis remarked wearily.

"At present, we are unfortunate," Bridle-path admitted.

"I would not care so much were it not for Estella."

"What of her? Where is she?"

"I know not. I lost sight of her in the flight from the outlaws' camp, and have not seen her since."

"Better that than the same lot which has overtaken you."

"True."

"General," Manfred interrupted, flippantly, "have you no sorrow for the child of yours you see already in trouble?"

"Young man," Curtis answered, gravely, "do you believe you are my son?"

"You know the claim of certain of our friends. They vow I am brother to Estella. Her father is in doubt. You claim that honor. Others say Richard M. Knox was her parent. When authorities differ, how shall rustics decide? I suppose I had a father. Who was he? I've been told it was Richard Knox, but if Estella is my sister, and you are her father, I am disposed to ask for your blessing and share of your real estate."

"Levity aside," the mine-owner continued, not less gravely than before, "I feel that I ought to make a statement in this case. I am an old man, and the hardships of the last few hours are telling on me. While I mean to struggle to the last, it is among the things possible that I shall succumb and die here, even if no violent means are used to hasten my end. Such being the fact, I feel I should make a plain, truthful statement of certain facts, so that if I never see Estella again, you can tell her that I spoke thus at this critical period, alleging all to be correct in every way."

He addressed Bridle-path rather than Manfred, and the surveyor replied:

"While I trust we all shall escape, I will carefully heed your wishes, sir."

"Then let me begin well back."

"I knew Richard Mayo Knox when we were both young men, though not until we were fully grown. He had married a Cuban girl, and the issue was twins, a boy and a girl. The latter died. As far as I know, the boy lived; certainly, he lived for several months.

"Richard and his wife did not get on together well. She was of a fiery nature, and he had peculiarities which were quite as bad. They separated, and she soon died."

"I was told that her child was taken back to Cuba by her servant, an old woman named Hesper."

"That fixes my case," Manfred observed. "I was the boy taken to Cuba by Hesper. Proceed, sir!"

"I was a widower before Richard was," Curtis continued. "My wife had died, leaving me with one child, E-tella. This child was for a time in the care of Richard's wife, after her own daughter died."

"When we were thus left wifeless, Richard and I, as a matter of duty, both looked about to find some one who would be a mother to our children. I have lately been taunted with having been outstripped in the race by Knox. It is true that we both decided on the same lady, and that she preferred him. She married him."

"Almost immediately after, we decided to quit our home and try our fortunes in the mines. Both of us were doing poorly where we were, and I think Knox wanted to lose sight of his boy. He never seemed to care for it, yet he tried to get possession of it. When he failed he vowed he never would see it again, and said there was too much of its mother's blood in its veins."

"The second Mrs. Knox agreed to care for my daughter, and did so faithfully."

"We came to Glory Eden, and Richard and I worked the Black Bear together. The story of its failure is well known in Glory Eden. My partner called himself Mayo, here."

"To Knox its want of success was exasperating. He always had been eccentric and irritable. He now became more so, and was always out of temper. He took to drink, too, and this upset his nerves, and made his temper worse than ever."

"His wife was a mild, meek woman, and not fit to deal with him. She did not know how to humor or guide him, and her very meekness made her the more an object of the contempt which sprung up in him, and of his abuse."

"I boarded with them then, and did what I could to avert storms and comfort her. As a result she turned to me for sympathy, and he became jealous!

"Of course after that matters became worse. I tried to keep down the storm, but it was uphill work; the poor woman made matters all the worse by turning to me for protection when he became so violent as to be dangerous, and perhaps a man more sane would have had doubt."

"To-day people here are uncertain which died first, Richard or his wife. You will hear the matter stated both ways; I frequently have. The truth was as follows:

"One day Richard and I stood in the Black Bear Mine. He had hoped against hope, and toiled without recompense, but, at last, had decided that it would be folly to labor there further. Richard was very angry, and his language was bitter and complaining.

"Of course he was not blaming me, but an unfortunate event caused fresh trouble.

"Mrs. Knox entered the mine. She had come there before, occasionally, and even her husband's diseased mind had thought nothing of it; but it was different then. He declared she had come to see me, and raved without reason.

"He had been drinking heavily, and was not steady on his feet. He stood close to a shaft. Suddenly a wild and murderous idea seized him; he would throw his wife down the shaft!

"He grasped her, and surely would have done as he said, but I too lay hold of her, and wrenched her from his grasp. Furious with passion he thrust his hand in his pocket where he kept his revolver, and stepped back a pace—stepped back into the shaft, and fell to his fate. I descended quickly, but he was dead!

"For his sake we never told the particulars; it was enough that he had fallen in and been killed. And I solemnly swear that I have told the truth concerning that tragedy. Of late, an enemy has accused me of pushing Knox down. No one pushed him; he fell, as I have said.

"The statement that I managed to send away all who were then residents of Glory Eden, too, is utterly false. They went because there was little money being made here, then.

"Mrs. Knox cared for my child until the former died. She was a kind, true woman. I wish her lot had been happier.

"If the story that Estella was Knox's child was founded on some person's honest statement, it is an error that rose from her being under Mrs. Knox's care. But I want to say emphatically, before witnesses, that she is *my* child. You have heard the true story.

"Of late I have been beset by enemies, and my conduct may have been strange. I am not a heroic man, and I am not young. They frightened me; I wavered. But there was no guilt to hide.

"Mr. Bridle-path, if I should die in the mountains, I rely upon you to put this story before Estella in its plain, honest nature."

Bridle-path had not listened with any small degree of interest, and he answered:

"I realize your position, sir, and will be guided by your wishes in every respect. I hope, however, you may have the good fortune to see her daily through many years."

"My own mood is not so hopeful. These men are infuriated over the failure of their plans. The fight at the camp was very disastrous; they are scattered and demoralized; and not half of those who escaped are armed. While stout-hearted Graf Giblon may yet get them in shape, most of them are now disheartened. Bitter and reckless as they are, it would be just like them to give all of us over to the fate from which Giblon so narrowly saved you."

"Your views are logical, but I hope to baffle the enemy."

"How?"

"By prompt escape."

"But that is impossible."

"Perhaps not. While you talked I have been at work on my bonds. I am unusually strong in the wrists, and I have broken the bonds. Now, can we get out of this recess?"

Bridle-path put his hand to the back of his neck and drew out a knife.

As quickly as possible he freed both of his companions.

"What now?" he asked.

"Can we climb the rocks?" Curtis asked, doubtfully.

"The most dangerous way of all. Let a loose stone rattle down, and the whole gang would be using us for targets in the twinkling of an eye."

"Their rifles have been leaned against yonder rock," remarked Manfred, his dark eyes flashing wildly. "I say, let's fight! Better to die like men than rats."

"The plan is open to improvement," returned Bridle-path. "I say, let us get the rifles, skulk along in the shadow of the cliff as long as we are not discovered, and then make a dash of it, fighting as we go."

Manfred and Curtis approved of the plan promptly. The latter was well aware that he would cut only a poor figure in a "dash," but unselfishly put his own interests aside for those of his younger companions.

They lost no time in acting.

Quietly they moved toward the rifles.

They were not long in seeing that only a part of these weapons had been put away. Others remained in the hands of their owners, and there was a strong probability that when the trio fled they would go to the music of rifle-practice.

The coveted weapons were gained, and they turned their faces down the gulch. Cautiously, silently they crept along at the base of the cliff. The outlaws were arguing earnestly.

Foot by foot the fugitives progressed. There

began to be some hope of their escape, it seemed' but a change was at hand. There was a stir among the outlaws, and then one of them suddenly fired.

A flash—the "ping" of a bullet—the report of the rifle! The leaden messenger had missed only by a little margin. Manfred and Bridle-path seized Curtis by the arms, and the three started to run at full speed.

Other shots followed, and as chance would have it, each of the fugitives received a bullet in his clothing, but without getting a wound. The event showed them, however, that it would not do to offer so broad a target. They separated, and each went his own way. Curtis was kept at the front, while his companions lingered somewhat and returned the fire from their repeating-rifles, to let the outlaws see there was mutual danger.

Curtis surprised every one by his speed, and, seeing that the nature of the ground was favorable to his plan, Bridle-path decided to resort to stratagem.

They did some alert dodging in and among the rocks and passes, and succeeded in accomplishing their end. Then they hurried away quietly.

Another encounter was at hand; they came suddenly upon two persons, and seeing that one was a woman, they momentarily thought Estella was found. The woman proved to be Mrs. Daisy Westcott, however, and her companion, Wesley Charles Eastman.

The adventuress was not in her usual spirits. A chance shot at the camp-fight had given her a wound from which she was suffering, but which did not disable her.

At such a moment the first party could do no more than to join forces with the second, though neither was wanted.

Eastman was even more philosophical than Manfred, and he indulged in jokes as they went, and conducted himself with airy unconcern.

But to the others the occasion was one of doubt, gloom, anxiety and danger.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. THE BATTLE THAT RAGED.

"HOLD up, thar January! Don't yer think you kin get clear o' my hold, ye skittish critter! I'll hev yer know that when Roarin' Bill an' his braves set out ter do a thing, et is done. No kickin', gal, fer it won't do no good!"

The words sounded from the darkness as Bridle-path and his party moved silently along the mountain-side, and then five persons, two of them females, emerged from behind a wall of rock.

"Estella!" Charles Curtis exclaimed.

An answering cry came from one of the females, and she sprung toward the previous speaker.

The situation dawned upon every one quickly, and each person as quickly moved. It was plain that deadly enemies had met, and as the possession of the girl was a bone of contention to be settled in one way only, the men rushed to the conflict with the zeal and celerity of those whose lives are cast in a wild land.

Bridle-path felled Roaring Bill with his clubbed rifle, but the fellow was soon up again, and as Curtis was of but little use, and Eastman was not seen in the struggle, the three outlaws began to gain advantage.

The surveyor was locked in Phin Hicks's grasp, and each was trying to trip the other, when Center-shot Steve ran forward and, holding a revolver to Bridle-path's side, was about to pull the trigger. But other eyes were upon him, and the blade of a knife suddenly pierced his arm, driven by a strong hand.

The revolver fell to the ground, and Steve sprung back with a roar of pain.

Just then Bridle-path gained advantage over Phin and began to belabor him soundly. A few blows satisfied the outlaw's zeal and he broke away. Then, too, Manfred picked up the fallen revolver and began to blaze away at Roaring Bill and his associates, and as all three had tired of the fight, they fled with willing rapidity.

Estella had stood pale and trembling, but now threw herself into her father's arms.

"Thank Heaven! I see you again!" she exclaimed.

Wesley Charles Eastman drew near to Cythia.

"Can we save anything out of the wreck?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Victory has gone to your enemies, and they love me none too well. Do we go in to be ground between the mill-stones, or can we absorb the grist and save paying costly toll?"

"You talk in riddles, but I have nothing to say to you. You can go your way; I'll go mine."

"What can we expect from our enemies?"

"What we deserve, perhaps."

Cynthia spoke impatiently. The latest turn of fortune's wheel had reunited Estella and Bridle-path. What would be the result? Was there really love between them, or had she diagnosed the case wrong? However it was, they were once more together, and the island-girl was resolved to stay with them if she could.

Bridle-path advanced to her with extended hand.

"Miss Giblon," he spoke, gravely, "I again owe you my life. But for you the outlaw would have sent a bullet to a vital spot."

"He bears you no love."

"That is not the point. I want to thank you as you deserve. You have repeatedly been my helper in time of necessity. Adventurer that I seem, my life is not valueless to me. I thank you earnestly."

"Fate willed it so, I think. I owe you gratitude," she added, in a lower voice. "I do not forget; I never forget. I know my friends and never desert them. I am more faithful than life, for life deserts us when we crave its company the most. Believe me, I am your friend!"

Bridle-path did not fail to read the undercurrent. He saw Cynthia flash a glance at Estella, and read the island-girl's heart well. He was sorry for her. Wild and fierce as she was there was much of good in her nature,—good that had been left wofully uncultivated by those who should have seen to it.

It was Manfred who suggested the advisability of moving on. Roaring Bill and his associates had gone in haste, and might keep going, but to those who knew them best, this was doubtful.

"Unless Miss Giblon can, and will, give us the points of compass, we know not which way to go," Bridle-path observed. "All is a jumble in this wild solitude."

Instead of answering, Cynthia abruptly demanded:

"Where is Eastman?"

He was gone, no one knew when or where.

"Let him go," the surveyor remarked. "We do not aspire to such company."

"You may have his company before you know it," Cynthia returned, quickly. "There is treason in his mind, and you will do well to heed it. Bill Blood and his fellows are heedless bravos; he may find them, put chaos into order, and get all the band on your track in a short time. This solitude may be an unknown land to you, but it is not so with the mountaineers. They can rally quickly, and as quickly strike you, when clew to your whereabouts is gained."

"What do you advise?"

"Let me conduct you to a place of refuge."

"Where?"

"Only a short distance away. 'Tis a cave where you can hold your own against odds."

"But the mountaineers may know of it."

"They do!"

"Yet, you advise us to go there."

"Yes, because it is your one place of safety." Bridle-path was silent. Cynthia, if faithful, was the one person of the party who could save them from the desolation of the mountain and its consequent dangers. But would it not be as risky to trust her as a tigress?

"You hesitate," she added. "I am no angel, but I am not deceitful. What I do is done openly; when I strike, it is at the face, not the back, of my enemy. There are those here for whom I have no liking, but you are here, too. Trust me! Give me a chance to help you out of trouble, and you shall not regret it."

Mr. Curtis heard the last part of this speech, and he promptly advised that she be given the lead. Manfred and Mrs. Westcott followed suit, and though Estella was silent, Bridle-path raised no objection.

If he had known all the events of the night it would have been different, but Estella was silent. He yielded with the mental reservation that his gaze always would be upon Giblon's daughter, to guard against treachery.

She led the way with a step as free and light as if no hardship had been endured during the night.

The cave was reached and found to be a large and comfortable place. It was one of the refuges the outlaws had prepared for use, in case it was needed. It had been the home of several of the island band for several weeks, while the slow and careful preparations were being made for the outbreak, and Cynthia had several times been there before.

Darkness now prevailed, but one of the several torches on hand was found and lighted, and evidence of recent occupancy was found; the coals of a dying fire, when raked open, gave out a bright light.

Manfred armed himself with a torch and undertook to look through all of the several branches of the cave, to learn definitely whether there was more than one entrance. Mrs. Westcott found a discarded blanket and lay down, avowing herself desperately ill. Curtis and Estella sat by the fire. Bridle-path stood near the entrance, and Cynthia hovered near.

She suddenly approached him.

"You look concerned," she observed.

"I am all of that; I am greatly worried. Graf Giblon's men were scattered by the disastrous fight at the camp, but that state of affairs will not long continue. With the admirable discipline of the band, they will soon gather again. Then where will they go? The camp is gone. What if they come here?"

Cynthia changed expression.

"I had not thought of that," she admitted; "that is, I had not studied out that the natural law of events might send them here."

"I'm afraid this is not the safest of refuges."

"I hope you don't blame me?"

"On the contrary, I believe you have acted conscientiously."

"Is your faith as strong as that?"

"In brief, I believe in you."

"The time is coming when you will decide one way or the other," declared Cythia, indirectly, "and I hope you will weigh all things in the balance justly. Weigh the strong heart; then compare it with one that is weak and vacillating. Weigh unwearyed devotion; weigh cold selfishness and deceit. Weigh with care, for—"

She stopped short, and Bridle-path's rifle flashed to his shoulder. There had been a roar outside; the report of many guns blended almost as one.

Cythia caught the surveyor's arm.

"They fight again!" she exclaimed.

The words were almost drowned in the echoing sound of other rifles which followed the first. They did not seem to be over twenty rods away, and the repeating rifles admitted of scarcely a lull. The volume of the sound, too, told its story; no small force was engaged, but it was probable that it was the old fight of the camp renewed.

"It is the final struggle," Cythia declared.

"Doubtless."

"When it is ended we shall be in vital danger or saved! Saved? That will be your lot. But what of me?"

"If Glory Eden wins, they must, they shall respect you."

"And then?"

"Then?"

"Yes," she boldly replied, growing unconscious of the fight; "yes, then what? I shall be houseless and homeless. Where shall I go? Who will shelter me?"

Bridle-path, worried to a painful degree by the battle, yet retained enough control over other matters to see the drift of her words.

"They will be glad to help you at Glory Eden."

"But you—you?"

"I will help you, too."

"Is that all I asked?" she demanded, almost fiercely. "Man, are you so blind you can not see that I want you, you and your love? What is Glory Eden, what is pomp and wealth, what is all the world if I lose you? Bridle-path, I am not a cold woman of the world. I have spoken plainly. You know my heart. What is my fate?"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A REMARKABLE MEETING.

THE rifles still sounded, but, at last, Bridle-path forgot them. He looked at Cythia with dismay not easily explained, for the good in her nature had appealed to him strongly, but nevertheless, with that feeling clearly pictured, in his face.

"Miss Giblon," he answered, hurriedly, at last, "let us not dwell on this subject now. The night is one of painful events; let us think only of protecting our lives. Let us continue to be friends!"

Despite all his caution, and his wish to avoid committing himself, he stumbled over the last part of his speech, and hesitated before the final word in a way not to be mistaken by one as shrewd as Cythia.

A change flashed over her face, and he knew the deed was done, though the new expression was so strange and transient that he could not fully interpret it.

She recovered much quicker than was to be expected, but before she could reply a figure appeared at the entrance. It was a grim and awe-inspiring figure. Blood from a fresh wound smeared a bronzed face, and its owner staggered as he walked. He reeled when he came to a halt.

Bridle-path recognized Strawberry Sam and stood on the defensive, but the miner again advanced, holding out one hand and feeling his way as if he had gone blind. He took three steps, hesitated, wavered and fell heavily to the ground.

"He is dead!" Cythia exclaimed.

"Only in a swoon, I judge. But I know not what to do with such a guest."

"Drag him to one side for the present. We can't bother with him, for we may have to fight, yet. But, listen! Firing has ceased; the battle is over. Who has won?"

Who, indeed? It was a question Bridle-path would have been glad to answer. But at that moment Manfred hurried to him from the interior.

"Only this one entrance, captain," he said, lightly, "and I have one more defender. In another chamber of the cave, where recent occupation was proved by a fire still burning, I found two prisoners. They are strangers to Glory Eden; a young man and his wife. He is a muscular, bold-looking fellow, and a good man to have. But, was I dreaming, or did I hear firing?"

The situation was quickly explained.

"Wait!" Manfred directed. "I'll go and learn the result."

He passed out quickly, and Bridle-path and Cythia awaited the result with anxiety.

One, five, ten minutes passed. Manfred came hurrying back.

"It's all over but the shouting," he lightly an-

nounced. "The outlaws are defeated, and this time decisively. The whole of the Glory Eden war-party was on hand, and the enemy are literally crushed. The few who live have been put to flight, and all trouble is over."

Cythia turned and walked quickly toward the interior of the cave.

Manfred had seen Mayor Allen, and that official soon made his appearance. He shook the surveyor's hand cordially.

"I am glad to see you alive," he declared. "There are many who will never see the day which is just dawning, and the heaviest losers are the outlaws, by far. We shall have no more trouble; Glory Eden is purified. Graf Giblon died fighting manfully, and your old foes, Bill Blood, Phin Hicks and Center-shot Steve were among the other victims. So is Wesley Eastman, and we need shed no tears for him. I have learned that he had hunted up and was accompanying Giblon's men here, to be revenged on you, when we happened on the gang. Eastman fell at the first fire."

Bridle-path drew a breath of relief.

After a little more talk with Allen the surveyor moved toward the fire. Near it stood the man and woman, the strangers Manfred had found in the cave.

The man advanced toward Bridle-path.

"They tell me you are leader here, sir," he remarked, "and though I am cramped from being two days in bonds, I shall be glad to fight with the rest, if necessary. I trust—"

He stopped short, started, looked keenly at Bridle-path, and then exclaimed:

"Robert!"

"Richard!" Bridle-path answered.

Great surprise was in the voice and manner of both, but they clasped hands with warmth which left no doubt of earnest good feeling.

"You here!" the surveyor added.

"I can well repeat the words. I have not heard from you in years, but I dare say I am the one to blame. I have been all over the West in that time."

"And I have been acting as surveyor in the wilds of the Rocky Mountains. I have had no intercourse with the world we once knew."

"If you have been a mountaineer I fancy I have progressed further in life than you. I am married. You must see my wife at once: I will call her. Vloma, come here!"

Quickly Bridle-path answered, but without evidence of great surprise:

"What did you call her name?"

"Vloma."

The surveyor grasped his companion's arm.

"Richard, do you know a man with a birthmark on his arm like a strawberry?"

The man addressed recoiled.

"Great heavens! do you know of him? Is he again on our track?"

"Come with me and you shall see. You will look on a man wounded and helpless; perhaps, on a dying man."

Richard looked bewildered, but, recovering after a moment, motioned his advancing wife back. Together he and Bridle-path went where Strawberry Sam lay. The surveyor held a torch over him. The life-hunter lay on his back, his eyes closed and his breathing loud and painful.

"It is he!" Richard uttered, in a deep voice.

Then he stood in silence for minutes, but finally added, in a low and husky voice:

"This man was my wife's uncle, yet he sought to kill us on more than one occasion."

"Why?"

"Briefly, he reared Vloma in solitude; reared her like a recluse; and when she grew older he selfishly refused her all company except with himself and an old woman. I met Vloma and married her, and his rage know no bounds. He pursued us for weeks; he tried to kill us more than once. It was an experience of horror. I think you know I am not a coward, but I confess this man has made life a burden not only to Vloma but to me. You don't know what it is to have him hunting you!"

Bridle-path shrugged his shoulders and thought he did have a faint conception of it, but Richard looked only at Strawberry Sam.

"He is dying," was the added comment.

"I believe you are right. He has been wounded, as you see, and that heavy breathing can have but one meaning, I think. I will send some one to bring the Glory Eden doctor."

He looked for Manfred, but the Cuban was not to be found, so Mayor Allen agreed to bear the message.

Once more Richard called his wife.

"Vloma," he said, "a strange meeting has transpired here. This is my brother, Robert Justin Knox. You often have heard me speak of him."

He put their bands one in the other, and Vloma greeted Robert Justin Knox, Bridle-path no longer, with pleasure and surprise. But Richard soon gave her a shock.

Breaking the news gently, he let her know her uncle was near. Terror seized upon her. She turned very pale, and all his urging failed to prevail on her to look on the dying man's face.

"He was always a strange man, but probably did not intend to be unjust," Richard Knox explained. "Something was lacking in his mind,

and I had to lose Vloma or take her as I did. His brutality when he pursued us was not that of a sane man. Frankly, it will be a great relief to us when he is called to his final home."

"Another man has died near, but long ago, whom you must remember. It was Richard Mayo."

"Richard Mayo? Was that our step-mother's son?"

"Yes. He was two years old when our good father married Mrs. Mayo; a second marriage on each side. Richard Mayo was none related to us, though he often called himself Richard Knox, and many knew him only by that name. He died in Glory Eden, nearly twenty years ago, leaving a reputation not of the best. Our father and he did not agree, and, I think, never saw each other after they were grown to manhood."

"Nicholas Knox was a just and honorable man," Robert declared. "If Richard Mayo-Knox was otherwise, I have no interest in him."

"True."

"But, brother, have you forsaken the family name? I have heard you called 'Bridle-path.'"

"I am, I may say, a very well-known surveyor, and when I came here to find a man who knew of certain illegal work in surveying, I temporarily dropped the name we regard so highly. 'Bridle-path' veiled my identity well. I failed to find my man, but got so mixed up in other events that, soon after, I sunk my identity so deep as to eradicate from my clothing every specimen of the name 'R. J. Knox' that was worked in them. But I'll tell you of this, later."

Estella and Mr. Curtis approached.

"Do you know where Cythia is?" the mine-owner asked.

"No."

"I wished to see her at once, and promise her a reward for helping us—despite certain counts against her—but she is invisible."

"She and Manfred may have walked away together. He is not present, it seems. Doubtless, they are in the inner room of the cave."

Day had dawned outside. The men of Glory Eden were busy over the battle-field. All of the outlaws received burial there. Some one who had known of the association of Bill Blood, Phin and Steve, saw them laid side by side. Graf Giblon was buried alone, at the foot of a great cliff.

Wesley Eastman's body was taken to Glory Eden. No relative ever claimed it, and the only light on his past was in the form of sundry newspaper clippings which indicated that he once had been a convict under the name of Charles Wesley.

In his effects at the hotel was proof that he had written the "Diogenes" letters to Strawberry Sam. He had practiced diligently on a counterfeit hand, and often written the word Diogenes. He evidently had set the miner on to Bridle-path out of mere hatred and to be rid of a rival.

Strawberry Sam did not recover consciousness, and died ignorant of the fact that, at last, he was near the man he had so long hunted. The hunt, and his strange life, ended together.

Manfred and Cythia had not reappeared when the party left the cave, and the first tidings of them came a week later in a note to Mr. Curtis. It was as follows:

"GREETING:—Be it known that on the 15th inst., at Giant's Horseshoe, Col., Manfred Cuban and Cythia Giblon were united in marriage. Enough said!

"MANFRED."

It was a complete surprise, for not even among the island people had it ever been known that Manfred and Cythia were acquainted, but the marriage was a thing of fact. Where they now are is not known at Glory Eden, but Bridle-path fully believes Cythia's better nature has prevailed, and that her back has been turned on the past forever. He hopes she is happy.

Mrs. Westcott did not recover her health, and Mr. Curtis generously saw her cared for while she lived.

The mine-owner built another and finer residence, and, shortly after, prevailed upon Robert and Richard Knox to enter his service at the mine.

Events ran their course as was generally expected, and Estella became Mrs. Robert. As she and "Bridle-path" became better acquainted they decided to join their fortunes, and did so. Vloma was found an estimable young woman, and the Knox families live in harmony.

The presence of Richard and his wife in the cave was due to the fact that, in a neighboring town, they accidentally learned of Graf Giblon's contemplated outbreak, whereupon they were seized and imprisoned in the cave.

Such of the outlaws as escaped made haste to get out of danger, and were seen at Glory Eden no more.

Mr. Curtis continued the visits to the old Black Bear Mine which seemed so strange to all but him, though his claim that the solitude there, was composing to him was never fully intelligible to others.

He now leaves the management of the Banquo mostly to his son-in-law, and no one in town is more highly esteemed than the one-time Bridle-path.

THE END.

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